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**Political Psychology of International Relations in the Frame of Populism
Cases of Hungary and Türkiye**

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INTRODUCTION

Populism, by its very nature, operates primarily at the point of intersection of domestic and international politics and often obscures the boundaries between the two. At the domestic level, populism is characterized by its appeal to the “people” instead of perceived “elites”.¹ In contrast, at the international level, it often displays itself as resistance to global norms and institutions.² Because of its dual focus, populism requires an analytical approach that combines micro-level interactions, such as the role of leaders, with macro-level dynamics, such as systemic pressures and societal responses. In this context, this dissertation takes a stance that the political psychology of populist international relations provides fertile ground for examining how populist leaders navigate and reshape the global order through their domestic and international strategies.

This dissertation begins by outlining the theoretical framework, which provides a solid foundation to build this work. Here the political psychology of populist international relations, specifically taking Türkiye³ and Hungary as case studies, is examined. To settle populism within the wider field of international relations, this study primarily utilizes a poststructuralist theoretical perspective as a foundation for situating populism within the field of international relations. Constructivism and neoclassical realism serve as supporting, secondary frameworks for contextualizing the discourses, offering corresponding insights into structural constraints (neoclassical realism) and identity formation (constructivism) as they relate to poststructuralism’s focus on discourse and power dynamics. These theories offer corresponding insights into how populism operates as both a political and psychological phenomenon in the international arena. poststructuralism highlights the role of discourse in challenging established narratives and power structures and in constructing alternative views of international politics.⁴

¹ Majia Nadesan and Amit Ron, “Between ‘the People’ and Elites: Introduction,” in *Mapping Populism: Approaches and Methods*, ed. Majia Nadesan and Amit Ron (New York: Routledge, 2020): 123–145. ; Matthijs Rooduijn, “The Nucleus of Populism: In Search of the Lowest Common Denominator,” *Government and Opposition* 49, no. 4 (2014): 573–599.

² Mahmoud Metawe, “Populism and Domestic/International Politics: Theory and Practice,” *Review of Economics and Political Science* 9, no. 3 (2024): 194–211, at 205.

³ The country name “Turkey” has been changed to “Türkiye” at the UN (United Nations, “Turkey’s Name Changed to Türkiye,” *UN News*, 2022, <https://turkiye.un.org/en/184798-turkeys-name-changed-t%C3%BCrkiye>). Therefore, in this dissertation the name is going to be used as Türkiye.

⁴ Frank A. Stengel and Dirk Nabers, “Symposium: The Contribution of Laclau’s Discourse Theory to International Relations and International Political Economy Introduction,” *New Political Science* 41 (2019): 248–262; Mario Baumann, “Poststructuralism in International Relations: Discourse and the Military,” in *Handbook of Military Sciences*, ed. Anders McD. Sørensen (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 1–18.

Neoclassical realism offers a structural lens that focuses on how systemic constraints and domestic political factors interact to shape state behavior.⁵ Constructivism emphasizes the significance of socially constructed identities, beliefs, and norms⁶ in understanding the motivations and strategies of populist leaders. These theories provide a potent framework for analyzing the complicatedness of populist international relations.

Poststructuralism challenges the foundations of international relations by deconstructing the discourses and power dynamics that sustain the international order.⁷ By focusing on how leaders use language and symbolism to create and legitimize their power, this theory is particularly useful for examining the performative aspects of populist foreign relations. Populist leaders are skilled at constructing binary oppositions, such as “us” and “them” or “the people” and “the elite” to rally support and weaken their opponents.⁸ For example, Orbán’s opposition to the European Union (EU) and Erdoğan’s criticism of Western hegemony illustrate a larger populist tactic of rejecting existing institutions and norms in favor of alternative narratives of sovereignty and self-determination. Poststructuralism’s emphasis on discourse and power dynamics provides a deeper understanding of how populist leaders seek to reshape the international system to reflect their ideological priorities.

Neoclassical realism, which utilizes realist precedents, emphasizes the centrality of power and security in international relations.⁹ However, contrary to classical realism, which ascribes conflict to human nature¹⁰, or structural realism, focusing merely on systemic pressures¹¹, neoclassical realism includes the domestic political environment in its analysis. Populist leaders

⁵ Brian C. Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism,” *Security Studies* 17 (2008): 294–321.; Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶ Jeffrey T. Checkel, “The Constructive Turn in International Relations Theory,” *World Politics* 50, no. 3 (1998): 324–348.; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 391–416.

⁷ Jutta Weldes, “Poststructuralism and International Relations: Bringing the Political Back In,” *American Political Science Review* 94 (2000): 764; Charlotte Epstein, “Constructivism or the Eternal Return of Universals in International Relations: Why Returning to Language Is Vital to Prolonging the Owl’s Flight,” *European Journal of International Relations* 19 (2013): 499–519.

⁸ Ruth Wodak, “The ‘Establishment,’ the ‘Élites,’ and the ‘People’: Who’s Who?,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 16 (2017): 551–565; Benjamin De Cleen, “The Populist Political Logic and the Analysis of the Discursive Construction of ‘the People’ and ‘the Elite,’” in *Imagining the Peoples of Europe: Populist Discourses across the Political Spectrum*, ed. Jan Zienkowski and Ruth Breeze (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2019), 19–42.

⁹ Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* 51, no. 2 (1998): 144–172, at 147.

¹⁰ Duncan Bell, “Political Realism and International Relations,” *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 2 (2017): e12403; W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, “Political Realism in International Relations,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, 2010).

¹¹ Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name.”

such as Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Türkiye exemplify this interplay between domestic and international dynamics. Both leaders draw on domestic political narratives that focus on national sovereignty, cultural identity and resistance to foreign intervention to legitimize their foreign policies. This alignment between domestic political imperatives and international strategies highlights the usefulness of neoclassical realism in explaining the behavior of populist states. By framing international organizations and liberal global norms as threats to national sovereignty, populist leaders position themselves as protectors of their nations in an anarchic and competitive international system.¹²

In contrast, constructivism shifts the focus from material power to ideational factors such as shared beliefs, collective memories, and socially constructed identities.¹³ This perspective is particularly important for understanding how populist leaders mobilize support through narratives that emphasize historical grievances, cultural exceptionalism, and existential threats. For example, both Erdoğan and Orbán have drawn on collective traumas, such as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire or Hungary's struggle against foreign domination, to construct narratives of national revival and resistance. These narratives resonate deeply with their voters, fostering a sense of unity against perceived "others". Constructivism also emphasizes the fluid and contested nature of identities and interests in international relations and is consistent with the tendency to redefine these concepts to serve their own political agendas.¹⁴ By focusing on the socially constructed nature of international politics, constructivism provides a valuable lens through which to analyze how populist leaders adapt their strategies to changing domestic and international conditions.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the political psychology of populist international relations. As both a domestic and international phenomenon, populism draws on elements of each theory to construct its narratives, strategies and policies. Poststructuralism reveals the discursive methods through which populist leaders challenge global order, constructionism illuminates the importance of identity and collective memory, and neoclassical realism explains the structural

¹² Gerald L. Neuman, "Populist Threats to the International Human Rights System," in *Human Rights in a Time of Populism: Challenges and Responses*, ed. Gerald L. Neuman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1–19.

¹³ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, vol. 67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Sebastiaan Theys, "Small States Reconsidered," *Journal of International Affairs* 74, no. 2 (2022): 81–96.

¹⁴ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 2.

and systemic factors that generate populist behavior. Taken as a whole, these strategies emphasize the complexity of populism and its impact on modern world affairs.

The rest of the dissertation will base on this theoretical framework to analyze the discourses and policies of Erdoğan and Orbán in the cases of Türkiye and Hungary through using the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method. By comprehensively examining the foreign policy tactics and domestic political discourses of populist leaders, this research aims to shed light on how the populist leaders negotiate the intricacies of the global system while changing the intellectual and psychological foundations of their countries. In this way, it is hoped to gain further insights into the relationship among international relations, political psychology, and populism.

While the 2018 and 2022-2023 election periods in Hungary and Türkiye are the focal points of this dissertation, the chronological order is not only descriptive but also methodologically intentional. It allows for the examination of how populist discourse has shifted with changing national and global circumstances and demonstrates how populism has shifted its vocabulary, emotional tone, and psychological strategies in response to changing political environments. Moffitt argues that populism is better understood as a “political style” that performatively evolves over time, rather than as an established ideology.¹⁵ Similarly, Mudde and Kaltwasser emphasize that the temporal dimension of populism helps trace its rhetorical flexibility as well as its strategic adaptation to crises and electoral pressures.¹⁶ This thesis’s period-focused design elucidates the performative and processual aspects of populist communication, as well as the complex relationship between discourse, emotion, and global positioning. While a thematic comparison between themes such as anti-Westernism, Soros/Gülen narratives, jihadist terrorism, or pan-Turkish discourse would also be useful, the chronological method employed here makes a significant contribution, it documents the evolution, not the emergence, of these themes. Through this structure, it is possible to see how populist leaders reinterpret the same symbolic motifs to adapt to changing psychological and geopolitical demands.

Since the discussion revolves around the political psychology of populist international relations, it would be appropriate to start by defining political psychology, progressing from the specific to the general. After introducing political psychology within a historical framework, the

¹⁵ Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 28.

¹⁶ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 39–40.

definition and variations of populism will be examined. By using a method within the scope of the international relations theories mentioned above, the study aims to understand how populist international relations can be situated within these theoretical frameworks and how it reflects the psychological dynamics of leaders' foreign policy discourses.

Subsequently, a separate chapter will be dedicated to the political psychology of populist international relations. The reason for this is to examine the core problematic independently from the theoretical framework, in line with the thesis title, and to prepare the reader for the methodology section of the study. By analyzing the political psychology of populist leaders, the cases of Türkiye and Hungary will be explored. Accordingly, building on the question “in what ways does political psychology deepen the understanding of populist international relations making?”, this section aims to highlight the mutual interaction between populism and political psychology in global affairs.

It is of great importance to define the two main analytical ideas that form the basis of this thesis, namely political psychology and populist international relations, explain how they will be applied throughout the thesis, then move on to the theoretical and empirical sections. In this study, “political psychology” refers to an interdisciplinary field that examines the relationship between psychological processes and political behavior.¹⁷ Political psychology focuses on how political attitudes, leadership philosophies, and group behavior are influenced by cognition, emotion, identity, and personality. Political psychology enables the examination of how discursive framing activates emotional mechanisms such as pride, anger, and fear in the context of populist leadership.¹⁸ The leader's rhetoric serves as a psychological vehicle that appeals to people's needs for security and belonging. From this perspective, the study analyzes Erdoğan and Orbán's foreign policy discourses as a psychopolitical mobilization in which emotional narratives such as pride, victimhood, and sovereignty are transformed into both international and domestic legitimacy.¹⁹ Therefore, political psychology is viewed as a constitutive aspect of discursive construction rather than an external appendage, illuminating how identity politics

¹⁷ William J. McGuire and Shanto Iyengar, eds., *Explorations in Political Psychology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ David Patrick Houghton, *Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals, and Cases* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁹ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1941).

interacts with foreign policy choices and how emotions are transformed into political meanings.²⁰

In this dissertation, populist international relations refers to the emotional and discursive strategies through which populist leaders reshape the meaning of international politics. It examines how the people/elite conflict at the core of populism reverberates globally, alters international hierarchies, and transforms external actors into moral others.²¹ Thus, populist international relations examines how foreign policy becomes a tool for enforcing moral superiority, civilizational difference, and dominant identity.²² In this approach, international relations is viewed as emotionally charged and discursively constructed, and populist International Relations is treated less as a new theoretical subfield than as a conceptual framework linking poststructuralism and political psychology.²³ Using this framework, the following chapters demonstrate how Erdoğan and Orbán's foreign policy discourses create *national selves* (Turkish and Hungarian peoples) and international others (EU, West, immigrants) through emotionally charged narratives that combine international identity construction with domestic populism.²⁴

The theoretical foundations of both the theoretical and empirical chapters are built by integrating these conceptual frameworks. Positioned at the intersection of international politics, psychology, and rhetoric, the study reveals how populist leaders reimagine foreign policy as a symbolic and emotional act of world-building rather than a purely strategic endeavor. The methodology of the dissertation is thoroughly explained in the third chapter to clarify how the study is structured and operationalized. As will be discussed, employing constructivist and post-structuralist perspectives to interpret the political psychology of populist international relations through the case leaders' speeches during the election periods will not only provide significant analytical ease but also offer a fresh perspective. Therefore, CDA is chosen as the primary method. By its nature, CDA is a method that progresses through the researcher's interpretation

²⁰ Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²¹ Arkady R. Wojczewski, "Populism and Foreign Policy," *Global Affairs* 6, nos. 4–5 (2020): 411–429.

²² Frank A. Stengel and Dirk Nabers, "Introduction: The Contribution of Laclau's Discourse Theory to International Relations and International Political Economy," *New Political Science* 41 (2019): 248–262.

²³ Baumann, "Poststructuralism in International Relations".

²⁴ Funda Hisarlıoğlu, Lerna K. Yanık, Umut Korkut, and İdil Civelekoğlu, "Contesting the 'Corrupt Elites,' Creating the 'Pure People,' and Renegotiating the Hierarchies of the International Order? Populism and Foreign Policy-Making in Turkey and Hungary," *International Studies Review* 24, no. 1 (2022): viab052, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viab052>.

of selected speeches. Accordingly, as will be elaborated in the methodology section, the populist discourses constructed by the leaders of Hungary and Türkiye during specific election periods within the framework of foreign policymaking will be examined through the lens of the “us” versus “them” dichotomy. While conducting this analysis, the study will explore the objectives behind these discourses and the political-psychological framework within which leaders seek to appeal to voters and secure electoral support. The logic behind the creation of this framework lies in the claim that the populist discourses used by leaders in shaping foreign policy serve two purposes: on the one hand, to influence the construction of international relations, and on the other hand, to ensure continued support from their domestic constituencies.

Following the methodology section, the evolution of populism and the leadership trajectories of Orbán and Erdoğan will be examined in chronological order. Subsequently, during the last two general election periods in both countries, populist discourses shaping foreign policy-making processes of Hungarian and Turkish leaders will be analyzed within the framework of the “us” versus “them” dichotomy. Once the case study section is completed, a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between the two countries will be presented. This part will serve both as a summary of the previous sections and as a means to provide the reader with a broader analytical framework to contextualize the findings.

The comparison and analysis sections will be followed by the conclusion. This final section will summarize the core research problems of the study, the methodology employed, and the key insights derived from the research. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to address which aspects remain unexplored and what further research should be conducted to fill these gaps. Thus, the thesis will be brought to its conclusion.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Political Psychology

The multidisciplinary field of political psychology focuses on the interaction between psychological and political processes. In this dissertation, political psychology serves as a conceptual bridge between individual-level psychological mechanisms and macro-level political outcomes, particularly in explaining how populist leaders mobilize emotions such as fear, anger, and belonging in their domestic and foreign policy narratives.

Early political theorists such as Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli, who investigated aspects of human nature related to political action, can be considered pioneers of this field.²⁵ Aristotle refers to the fact that humans are naturally political. Similarly, Plato argues that a competent political system can only be built by taking into account the psychological characteristics of human beings. Likewise, Farabi, referencing Aristotle, defines humans as “a social and political animal”.²⁶ The concept of “human nature” constitutes the starting point of political philosophies built on the assumptions of the “natural state”.²⁷ For example, Hobbes emphasizes the evil and deceitful tendencies of human beings. In contrast, political philosophers such as Locke and Rousseau developed their thought systems by focusing on the natural goodness of human beings.²⁸

Theorists such as Plato, Aristotle, or Machiavelli openly discussed human nature issues related to political psychology, although there was no such discipline during these philosophers’ time. Values, belief structures, personality and international affairs occur most commonly, accompanied by intellect, political culture, identification, and leadership. Political psychology represents the empirical standing of many of its social science members in this respect.²⁹ In this context, Gustave Le Bon stands out as an important figure due to his early examination of various aspects of mass psychology and collective behavior, which are essential for understanding the dynamics of populist leadership. His sense of social consciousness has

²⁵Carl Murchison, *Social Psychology: The Psychology of Political Domination* (Worcester, MA: Clark University Press, 1929); Jeffrey C. Isaac, “Nature and Politics,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 2 (2013): 363–366.

²⁶ Özgür Osmanoğlu, “Platon’un Toplum ve Devlet Teorilerinin Psikopolitik Karakteri,” in *Travmaların Gölgesinde Politik Psikoloji*, ed. Gülgün Tuna (İstanbul: İnkılâp Yayınevi, 2019), 265–298.

²⁷ Houghton, *Political Psychology*.

²⁸ Osmanoğlu, “Platon’un Toplum ve Devlet Teorilerinin Psikopolitik Karakteri.”

²⁹ Kristen Renwick Monroe et al., “What Is Political Psychology?,” *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 4 (2009): 859–882, at 860, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40407084>

endured despite widespread criticism, particularly of his views on race and his disdain for revolutionary, particularly the French Revolution, change. Le Bon's concept of collective consciousness was controversial. In his work *Psychologie des foules*, he explored the dynamics of mass movements, especially in the context of the French Revolution. Le Bon analyzed how mass gatherings led to the erosion of individual critical thinking and logic, emphasizing the psychological factors influencing collective behavior.³⁰ His outlook on society can be summarized as follows:

*The crowds have never thirsted for the truth. Faced with the evidence that displeases them, they turn away, preferring to deify the error; if the error seduces them. Whoever knows how to delude them is easily their master, who tries to disillusion them is always their victim.*³¹

Le Bon's analysis is important to this thesis because it explains how populist leaders can manipulate collective emotions and mass behavior. The concept of mass psychology precedes the emotional manipulation techniques seen in modern populist movements in Hungary and Türkiye. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, can be a useful tool to analyze a society. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, stated in his *Unrest of Civilization (Das Unbehagen in der Kultur)* that psychoanalysis is a suitable theory in explaining social events, the development, and problems of civilization. According to Freud, it is tragic that human beings who are motivated by animal instincts try to become civilized beings at the same time. However, Freud also acknowledges that man cannot give up civilization.³² From this point of view, today's global order seems both against but also a natural result of the will of people's improvements. Freud's tension between civilization and instinct offers a psychological explanation for the paradoxical nature of populism: the simultaneous existence of the desire for order and rebellion. This framework helps contextualize why populist discourse often blends promises of moral restoration with appeals to primitive fears and desires.

The great thinkers of ancient Greece believed that political life could not be fully understood without an understanding of human nature. For centuries, leading philosophers consistently placed psychology at the center of their analyses of social and political life. Following in their

³⁰ Gustave Le Bon, *Kitleler Psikolojisi*, trans. Ebru Kanur (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2018), originally published 1895.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

³² Sigmund Freud, *Uygarlığın Huzursuzluğu*, trans. Hakan Barışcan (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2019), originally published 1930.

footsteps, Harold Lasswell emphasized the critical role of modern depth psychology in understanding politics.³³ The professional connections Lasswell sought to establish between psychology and politics attracted attention in the field. Even before Lasswell's efforts, thinkers such as Graham Wallas, who also mentored Lasswell, had made human nature a central element in political analysis, albeit in a different way.³⁴ As Segall aptly observed, the "real world" serves as the ultimate laboratory for psychologists.³⁵ From this perspective, his investigation into whether understanding the mechanisms behind human behavior is important to anyone beyond the field of psychology can be seen as one of the early efforts to connect human behavior to the political world and its broader application in the real world. This connection between psychological motivation and political behavior forms the backbone of the methodological design of this thesis, which aims to interpret the discourse of populist leaders not only as political communication but also as a psychological reflection.

Building on these previous perspectives, the work of Erich Fromm offers a direct psychological interpretation of the relationship between the concepts of fear, authority, and freedom, which is central to this study's examination of populist leadership. Erich Fromm's research on the "authoritarian personality" shows how people can follow authoritarian leaders out of fear and uncertainty. This explains why populist leaders often garner so much support. Fromm's "Escape From Freedom" argues that individuals seek consolation in harmony in today's more estranged society.³⁶ Populist leaders exploit this need for security by polarizing people based on a different narrative of *us versus them*. Fromm's analysis of how social conditions affect political behavior reveals how populist movements play on people's basic psychological needs for security and acceptance. According to Fromm, when people in the modern world feel lonely and helpless, they often turn to powerful authority figures who promise identity and order. People give up their autonomy for psychological security because they fear losing it. This process explains how populist leaders can mobilize significant segments of the population through emotionally charged rhetoric of threat and belonging. Fromm expanded on this concept in *The Sane Society*, arguing that authoritarian sentiments and conformity develop in capitalist and bureaucratic societies due to alienation. People are receptive to leaders who represent a shared identity or

³³ William Ascher and Barbara Hirschfelder-Ascher, *Revitalizing Political Psychology: The Legacy of Harold D. Lasswell* (New York: Psychology Press, 2004).

³⁴ Paul Roazen, *Cultural Foundations of Political Psychology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

³⁵ Martin H. Segall, *Human Behavior and Public Policy: A Political Psychology* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1976).

³⁶ Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*.

act as father figures because they aim to alleviate existential anxieties and foster a sense of community.³⁷ Fromm's views emphasize the psychological and emotional appeal of populist groups, which portray themselves as restoring lost unity and defending against external threats. This paradigm sheds light on the psychological processes underlying populism, especially in times of crisis, and shows how leaders like Erdoğan and Orbán use these strategies to influence and manipulate their supporters' views.

Political psychology is an interdisciplinary area that is relatively new to the world of international relations studies. Although it is not actually newly discovered, its place in literature in terms of terminology has taken place in the last century. From the 20th century onwards, political psychology began to gain importance as a separate academic field of study, especially as researchers sought to understand the psychological basis of political behavior, decision-making, and leadership as a result of major and devastating wars. The fact that all political worldviews are ultimately shaped by an understanding of human nature clearly shows that political psychology has a history as old as politics.³⁸ Political psychology, which is an interdisciplinary science and institutionalized with the International Society for Political Psychology (ISSP in short), first established in 1978 by the professor of psychiatry Jeanne N. Knutson. Political psychology is an academic field that deals with the interplay between psychological and political processes.³⁹

Extending beyond psychology and politics in its interdisciplinary dimension, political psychology began to emerge as a field of study in the 1920s and developed after the 1970s.⁴⁰ It is a dynamic field of research which offers a unique mix of approaches and methods in the social and cognitive sciences. Political psychologists explore interactions between macro-level political structures and micro-level factors such as decision-making, motivations and perceptions.⁴¹ Political psychology developed dramatically in the post-World War II period. Understanding this historical evolution clarifies how political psychology shifted from examining individual pathologies to collective political behavior. This analytical move parallels this dissertation's focus on the psychological dynamics of populist mass appeal. The researchers

³⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1955).

³⁸ Osman Selim Çalışkan, "Politik Psikolojinin Tarihsel Gelişim Süreci," *Bilecik Şeyh Edebali Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 6, no. 1 (2021): 179–191.

³⁹ Bahar S.Çevik-Ersaydı, "İnterdisipliner Bir Bilim Olarak Politik Psikoloji ve Kullanım Alanları," *21. Yüzyılda Sosyal Bilimler* 2 (2012): 39–62, at 40.

⁴⁰ Betül Özyılmaz and Merve Bağcı, "Türkiye'deki Politik Psikoloji Çalışmalarına Dair Bir Literatür İncelemesi," *21. Yüzyılda Sosyal Bilimler* 3 (2013): 223–237.21.

⁴¹ Sarah Stone et al., "Political Psychology," *WIREs Cognitive Science* (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1293>.

wanted to explain how ordinary, well-adapted members of Western society could handle the persecution in concentration camps. Racism and discrimination have motivated researchers to investigate the psychological profile that motivates people to maintain racist power structures and has also led to influential theories such as the authoritarian personality, whose roots define the Nazi authoritarian character but are used to explain traditional authoritarianism and racism in the United States. Psychological analysis and other case studies in psychobiographies have also been applied to political leaders at the individual level.⁴²

The contributions of psychology to politics come from the determination of interpersonal engagements, persistent motivations, knowledge, reasoning, perceptions of emotions and related aspects of the political world, as well as its affiliates, and its effect on what individuals seek.⁴³ The Oxford Manual of Political Psychology defines political psychology at the most general level as applying what is known about human psychology to policy research. The areas of benefit of political psychology emerge as theory and research on biopsychology, neuroscience, personality, psychopathology, evolutionary psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, and intergroup relations. Political psychology, which addresses political elites, their personalities, motives, beliefs, and leadership styles, and their judgments, decisions, and actions regarding domestic politics, foreign policy, international conflict, and conflict resolution, as well as voting, collective action, the impact of political communication, political socialization and civic education is also concerned with the dynamics of mass political behavior, such as group-based political behavior, social justice, and the political unification of immigrants.⁴⁴

Asking why people do what they do⁴⁵ and trying to find answers to these questions paved the way for the development of psychological studies in political science. One of the greatest difficulties inherent in the answers to such questions is that the thoughts that preceded a choice cannot be observed concretely. Kuklinski asks what political psychology is, and he defines it as the study of internal processes underneath political finding and decision-making.⁴⁶ Kuklinski quoted Sullivan, Rahn, and Rudolph; political psychologists have intensely used

⁴² Stone et al., “Political Psychology”.

⁴³ Adam J. Berinsky, Martha Crenshaw, and Tali Mendelberg, “Book Reviews: *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*,” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6 (2004): 969–983, at 969.

⁴⁴ Huddy, Sears, and Levy, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 45.

⁴⁵ Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin, eds., *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ James H. Kuklinski, *Thinking about Political Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

psychoanalysis to examine elites and data processing to examine citizens. Values and belief structures, personality, and international affairs occur most commonly, accompanied by intellect, political culture, identification, and leadership. Political psychology represents the empirical standing of many of its social science members in this respect. The branch of political psychology has a long past and a general apprehension. It comprises a wide variety of theories, ways, quantitative and qualitative research methods, and verdicts.⁴⁷

William McGuire classified the history of political psychology as proceeding through “three cycles”. The first cycle (the 1940s and 1950s) he defined as overshadowed by analyzing personality and culture. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the second cycle was described as concentrating on political approaches and voting behavior. The third cycle of the 1980s and 1990s is dominated by intensity on political ideology and belief systems.⁴⁸ Since McGuire introduced his classification more than thirty years ago, political psychology has moved in new and important directions. While his three-cycle model provided a useful foundation, more recent developments suggest that the field has grown far beyond those initial boundaries. The ways in which emotions, identity, and unconscious processes influence political behavior are increasingly receiving attention from researchers; these issues were not central to previous cycles. Insights from moral psychology⁴⁹ and neuroscience⁵⁰ have expanded knowledge of how people engage with politics. The digital age has also introduced new dynamics and challenges, particularly in light of the impact of social media, online polarization⁵¹, and algorithm-driven

⁴⁷ James H. Kuklinski, *Thinking about Political Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 23.

⁴⁸ Shanto Iyengar and William J. McGuire, eds., *Explorations in Political Psychology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ Nicole P. Nicoletti and William K. Delehanty, “(Im)Morality in Political Discourse?: The Effects of Moral Psychology in Politics,” in *Moral Psychology: A Multidisciplinary Guide*, ed. William K. Delehanty and Nicole P. Nicoletti (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 81–117.

⁵⁰ Michael L. Spezio and Ralph Adolphs, “Emotional Processing and Political Judgment: Toward Integrating Political Psychology and Decision Neuroscience,” in *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior*, ed. W. Russell Neuman, George E. Marcus, Ann N. Crigler, and Michael MacKuen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 71–95;

John T. Jost, H. Hannah Nam, David M. Amodio, and Jay J. Van Bavel, “Political Neuroscience: The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship,” *Political Psychology* 35 (2014): 3–42;

Isaac J. Haas, Christopher Warren, and Sarah J. Lauf, “Political Neuroscience: Understanding How the Brain Makes Political Decisions,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, ed. William R. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁵¹ Ana-Maria Bliuc, Areej Bouguettaya, and Kylie D. Felise, “Online Intergroup Polarization across Political Fault Lines: An Integrative Review,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021): 641215, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.641215>;

Joshua A. Tucker et al., *Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature* (New York: New York University, March 19, 2018), <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139>.

content. These changes could be called a possible fourth cycle that captures the emotional, cognitive, and technical complexity of contemporary politics.

The research field is essentially concerned with the behavior of individuals within a particular political system. Psychology alone fails to explain the Holocaust, stubborn conflicts, war, or much of the other behavior of states or collective political actors in complex environments. Individuals' behaviors change and respond to differences in political institutions, political cultures, leadership styles, and social norms.⁵² Political psychology evaluates the psychological factors that play a role in these relations by considering the interactions between large groups, masses, and nations.⁵³ In 1950, Adorno's combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and assessment techniques, making a groundbreaking contribution to political psychology. To better connect psychology and political behavior, this work also developed the F-scale personality test⁵⁴, which became a fundamental tool for assessing people's authoritarian tendencies.⁵⁵ This focus makes it a key area of study in the field of international relations. As can be understood from the definitions, political psychology has both a national and an international context.

When the relations between states within the discipline of international relations and the processes that shape these relations are examined, it can be easily seen the behaviors and attitudes that manifest as a reflection of human psychology. The fact must be contemplated that decision makers, as human beings, pass through a filter from the house they were born into to the neighborhood they grew up in, the institutions they received education from, and the types of books they read. This process is influential in the formation of their personalities and shapes the course of their lives. In this context, the approaches that do not put the states, therefore the "human", who is the founding actor of the international system, at the center, without examining the cultural values of societies and the historical processes that reflect these values, the paradigms that they will put forward in international relations were and will not be sufficient.⁵⁶

⁵² Huddy, Sears, and Levy, *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 3.

⁵³ Aydın Çevik, *Politik Psikoloji*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 2008).

⁵⁴ The F-scale (Fascism Scale), also known as the Authoritarian Personality Scale, is a psychometric instrument developed in the 1940s by Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford. It was first published in their seminal book *The Authoritarian Personality (1950)*. The F-scale was created to assess authoritarian tendencies in individuals, specifically, personality traits that incline people to support authoritarian ideologies or submit to authority figures. The "F" stands for Fascism because the research team aimed to understand the psychological roots of fascist sympathies that appeared during and after World War II.

⁵⁵ Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).

⁵⁶ Sertaç Şabap, "Uluslararası İlişkilere: Politik Psikoloji Perspektifinden Bakmak Neden Önemli?," *Sivil Siyaset Hareketi*, 2021, <https://sivilsiyasethareketi.com/Makale-uluslararasi-iliskilere-politik-psikoloji-perspektifinden-bakmak-neden-onemli-3266.html>.

As a matter of fact, it has been argued in the social sciences community for a while that rooted theoretical approaches such as realism, liberalism, and idealism are not sufficient in solving problems. At this point, contrary to classical theories, political psychology not only offers an interdisciplinary perspective, but also reveals the need for discipline in a wide area that will enable a healthy analysis of events and phenomena that are described as complicated.

International studies are concerned with the study of issues, whereas international relations is concerned with the application of ideas to explain relationships, usually between nations, but more recently also between other social groupings.⁵⁷ While international relations (IR) focuses on explaining patterns of interaction and power relations among political actors, international studies typically examine global issues across a variety of disciplines. IR has evolved from a state-focused field to one that increasingly addresses how social groups, collective identities, and individual actors shape global politics. This intellectual shift highlights the importance of political psychology because it allows researchers to examine how leaders' perceptions, emotions, and belief systems influence international behavior beyond purely structural or material explanations and reintroduces the human factor into IR theory. Integrating these psychological perspectives into international relations allows this thesis to examine how the emotional rhetoric of populist leaders shapes not only national identity but also their foreign policy behavior, linking domestic legitimacy to external stance. Therefore, the central argument of this dissertation is that integrating political psychology into IR helps explain how emotional and cognitive factors influence both domestic politics and foreign policy decision-making.

As a result, there is ongoing cross-pollination between the other social sciences and international relations. For instance, constructivism, a key new approach, has drawn substantially from sociology, from which it uses ideas and concepts to offer a better understanding of global social processes. Philosophy and economics, on the other hand, have impacted realists. It is normal for international relations, as a new study, to be inspired by theories and concepts from other social sciences, which frequently deal with analogous concerns of conflict and collaboration, as well as peace and aggression among humans. Psychology is fundamentally a social science study, like international relations; hence, the

⁵⁷ Anna Cornelia Beyer, *International Political Psychology: Explorations into a New Discipline* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

major focus of analysis for both psychology and international relations is the person, groups of individuals, and the social impacts they cause via their interactions.⁵⁸

Considering the fact that today politics is done through perceptions, it is possible that the most accurate definition of political engagement is the art of perception management.⁵⁹ When seeking a political solution to many national and international conflicts in contemporary age, perception operations are frequently used. Given that politics is analyzed over events, facts, actors, and processes, it can be easily understood how important psychology is at every stage. The factors that affect the policy maker in decision-making processes, the reflection of the decisions taken on the societies, the manipulation of written, visual and virtual media in terms of politics, asymmetric wars, intelligence moves that lead to disinformation, tactics and strategies aiming to shape the next step should be examined primarily through the discipline of psychology.⁶⁰ Political ideologies that try to analyze the already quite complex world in the period we live in with perception-selectivity based on certain pre-determined presuppositions are also directly related to psychology.⁶¹

Human behavior is one of the most important and fundamental concepts in politics as in psychology. Certain verbal or behavioral contents direct individuals and masses against events and facts⁶², therefore, today's studies of political science and psychology have come across in political psychology.⁶³ Political psychology is a discipline that can affect all social disciplines and underlie them, especially when media and policy issues are considered.⁶⁴ Political psychology distinguishes between real events and psychological interpretations of these incidents. The former mainly has objective reasons, but psychological causes also contribute to the outcome of the event. The resulting happening then affects the psychology of society, creating a vicious circle.⁶⁵ The study of political psychology examines the psychological processes that underlie relationships among large groups, societies, and countries. It also looks

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Arvind Kumar Singh, A. N. Misra, and T. N. Ojha, "An Analytical Study of Interrelation between Media and Power Politics," *IJPMonline* 2, no. 2 (2023): 13–18.

⁶⁰ David Patrick Houghton, *Siyaset Psikolojisi*, trans. Haluk İnaç and Didem Şekeroğlu (İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2009), originally published 2009.

⁶¹ John T. Jost, Christopher M. Federico, and Jaime L. Napier, "Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities," *Annual Review of Psychology* 60 (2009): 307–337, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163600>.

⁶² Ahmet Faruk Kansu and Nevzat Tarhan, "Politik Psikoloji ve Politik Öz-Yeterlik," *Üsküdar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 6 (2018): 1–18.

⁶³ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁴ Emre İnan, *Politik Psikoloji ve Siyasal İletişim* (Ankara: Kamu Diplomasisi Enstitüsü, 2015), 8.

⁶⁵ Gül Aktan, *Açık Kriptolar* (Ankara: Aşina Kitaplar Yayınları, 2006), 299.

at the relationships between these groups and their leaders and the interactions between leaders nationally and worldwide.

Populist leaders' use of strategies such as media manipulation and group concerns to influence electoral support and shape foreign policy narratives is similar to the impersonal influence that shapes political behavior.⁶⁶ These results suggest broader applications of political psychology in the populist international, where a leader's authority can be deliberately enhanced by exploiting the concepts of "us" and "them". Political communication and political psychology are integral to life. They cover topics such as leader communication, rhetoric, and sources of intergroup, international, or ethnic conflicts. These fields also examine political discourse, party manifestos, and persuasive communication techniques. They address issues like political gender discrimination, immigrant psychology, and government risk communication mechanisms. Additionally, they tackle problems in ensuring democratic electoral participation. Political communication and psychology also involve the use of the internet and new technologies during elections, as well as the semiotic meanings behind political party logos.⁶⁷ Consequently, political psychology contributes to understanding global affairs, the ways in which populist leaders shape international relations, and, most importantly, how they appeal to voters. It forms the theoretical and methodological basis of this dissertation's comparative analysis of Türkiye and Hungary. Interpreting populism as both a political and psychological phenomenon, the study aims to uncover how emotions and cognition jointly shape the rhetoric and behavior of populist governments.

1.2. Populism⁶⁸

Populism has been one of the top topics which is worked on by many academics. The term is used to define left-wing presidents in Latin America, right-wing parties in Europe, and both left-wing and right-wing presidential candidates in the United States of America.⁶⁹ Populism was a peasant movement in the 1890s.⁷⁰ It is based on the United States farmers' movement

⁶⁶ Diana C. Mutz, *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ İnan, *Politik Psikoloji ve Siyasal İletişim*, 11.

⁶⁸This part of the study is mainly based on the author's earlier articles namely: Büşra Özyüksel, "Populism in Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process," *Avrasya Sosyal ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 8, no. 1 (2021): 146–160. ; Büşra Özyüksel, "Foreign Policy Decision-Making Processes in the Frame of Populism: Cases of Türkiye and Hungary," in *International Congress on Afro-Eurasian Research VII Proceedings* (Tirana, 2023), 53–75.

⁶⁹ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷⁰ Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (London: Penguin Books, 2017).

that resisted capital sovereignty at the end of the century; it initiated the struggle against low credit policies, agricultural cooperatives and demands for participatory democracy and pioneered the establishment of the Populist Party of 1892. In political science, it describes the Russian Narodniki as a populist movement, advocating agricultural socialism that fought against tsarism and industrial capitalism in the second half of the 19th century. On the other hand, the idea of seeing populism as a “progressive” or “grassroots” movement is mostly based on America (north, central, and south). Another provision on populism is valid in Europe, in the given historical conditions. Populism is associated with irresponsible political propositions and political evils by liberal commentators (demagogism and populism are mostly interchangeable terms). While it is seen as populist movements close to fascism in Central and Eastern Europe, in the 1930s, representatives of the poor in Latin America were gaining strength.⁷¹

Populism has been described based on political, economic, social, and discursive characteristics.⁷² It is examined by using numerous theoretical perspectives, including structuralism, poststructuralism, modernization theory, social movement theory, party politics, political psychology, political economy, and democratic theory, archival research, discourse analysis, and various formal methodological approaches such as modeling.⁷³ The notion has been portrayed as a contemporary political zeitgeist.⁷⁴ It makes sense to emphasize populism’s ubiquity to some extent, as manifestations of discontent reflect populist sentiments, specifically, the claim of a virtuous people rebelling against a corrupt and ineffective elite.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 105.

⁷² Noam Gidron and Bart Bonikowski, *Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda* (Working Paper No. 13-0004, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 2013), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2459387> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2459387>.

⁷³ Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics,” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/422601>; Gidron and Bonikowski, *Varieties of Populism*;

Margaret Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, ed. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 25–44; Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds., *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969);

Kirk A. Hawkins, “Is Chávez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 8 (2009): 1040–1067;

Gabriel Goodliffe, *The Resurgence of the Radical Right in France: From Boulangisme to the Front National* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012);

Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007);

Daron Acemoglu and Alexander Wolitzky, “The Economics of Labor Coercion,” *Econometrica* 79, no. 2 (2011): 555–600.

⁷⁴ B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre, “A Typology of Populism: Understanding the Different Forms of Populism and Their Implications,” *Democratization* 27, no. 6 (2020): 928–946.

⁷⁵ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–563.

The difficulty of defining populism stems from the fact that the term has been used to define political movements, parties, ideologies, and leaders in geographical, historical, and ideological contexts. There is a general consensus in comparative literature that populism is confrontational, chameleon-based culture and context⁷⁶; the challenge, then, is to grasp how culture and context form populist politics and, in turn, how populism affects political shifts. It is challenging to find a common ideological denominator that binds the numerous nationalist movements, particularly when the grouping of political actors relies on an expansively lay understanding of the definition.

Körösenyi defines populism in three distinct ways: as an ideology-principle, as a process and connection, and as structural politics. In literature, populism is widely recognized as an ideology, which includes the following elements: a central antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite and an initiative to return power to the people as a homogeneous entity. Additionally, populism often involves declaring a crisis, placing the leader, who embodies the will of the people, in a central position, and engaging in adversarial politics, such as polarization strategies.⁷⁷ Aslanidis suggests abandoning the view of populism as strictly ideological and instead conceptualizing it primarily as a discursive frame.⁷⁸ According to him, frame analysis discloses a strong fit between rhetorical elements and cognitive characteristics of populism, equipping a solid methodological basis to canalize empirical research and supporting cooperation with neighboring fields of social science. Rather than viewing populism through a single lens, this study examines it using a hybrid analytical framework that takes into account both discursive and ideological aspects. This dual approach allows for a deeper understanding of how populist leaders deliberately construct foreign policy narratives to garner popular support and influence international relations. To go beyond simply restating existing concepts, this study integrates insights from political psychology, international relations, and the discursive method. It aims to make a unique contribution to the growing body of work on populist foreign policy rather than simply providing a descriptive summary. The central idea here is that the effects of populism are multifaceted, complex, and often multidimensional,

⁷⁶ David Arter, "The Breakthrough of Another West European Populist Radical Right Party? The Case of the True Finns," *Government and Opposition* 45, no. 4 (2010): 484–504.

⁷⁷ András Körösenyi, "Political Polarization and Its Consequences on Democratic Accountability," *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 4, no. 2 (2013): 111–138, <https://doi.org/10.14267/cjssp.v4i2.84>.

⁷⁸ Paris Aslanidis, "Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective", *Political Studies* 64, suppl. 1 (2016): 88–104.

making it impossible to fully understand how deeply it has affected contemporary world politics by focusing on just one conceptual component.

Macaulay proclaims analysis of populism is done through analysis of the narrative style or rhetoric of leaders in two cases.⁷⁹ In one via response to the leader's populist discourse, and in the other the analysis of populist discourse through party election manifestos. These analyses shed light on certain basic concepts in populism such as "people", "heartland", "elite" and "charismatic leader".⁸⁰ Taggart describes the notion of "heartland" as a psychological object of populist attention; while also dividing between a detailed "people" and a section whose concern is the idealized "heartland".⁸¹ Taguieff offers a concise collection of characteristics for new populism⁸², as opposed to Canovan, who tries to define all forms of populism in a systematic manner.⁸³ Laclau analyses populism not as a form of government, but as a "logic" that evolves as a result of the inability to solve big issues within society.⁸⁴ For Laclau, the "citizens" are more a construct of this logic than a predetermined one.⁸⁵ While these perspectives provide valuable conceptual frameworks, they tend to concentrate on the internal dynamics of populist movements. In this study, however, populism is examined not only as an ideological or discursive phenomenon, but also through its performative function in foreign policy discourse, especially during election periods. By incorporating CDA and political psychology, this research aims to offer an interdisciplinary contribution that connects populist rhetoric with broader questions of identity, emotion, and international political behavior.

Bos et al. suggests in particular, populist communicators rely on persuasive strategies in which social group cues become more pronounced and influence people's judgment and political participation on political issues.⁸⁶ This strategy is called the "populist identity framework" because ordinary people are seen as being threatened by various outside groups within the group.⁸⁷ Populist communicators engage in anti-elitist identity framing by blaming the political

⁷⁹ Monika Macaulay, "A Short Introduction to Populism", in *Populist Discourse: International Perspectives*, ed. Monika Macaulay (London: Routledge, 2019), 1–26.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Paul Taggart, *Populism* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2002).

⁸² Pierre-André Taguieff, "Populist Movements in Europe," in *The Populism Reader*, ed. Lars Bang Larsen, Cristina Ricupero, and Nicolaus Schafhausen (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005), 47–62.

⁸³ Margaret Canovan, "Two Strategies for the Study of Populism," *Government and Opposition* 19, no. 4 (1982): 544–552.

⁸⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005a).

⁸⁵ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 15.

⁸⁶ Linda Bos et al., "The Effects of Populism as a Social Identity Frame on Persuasion and Mobilisation: Evidence from a 15-Country Experiment," *European Journal of Political Research* 59, no. 1 (2020): 3–24.

⁸⁷ Bos et al., "The Effects of Populism as a Social Identity Frame," 3.

elite for social or economic problems that harm ordinary people. Another strategy is to blame immigrants for social problems, that is, the exclusionary identity framework. Finally, right-wing political actors tend to present ordinary people as a threatened ingroup, portraying them as victims of external threats or elites.⁸⁸ Finchelstein suggests that populism is based on imagining politics with a specific moralist perspective.⁸⁹ Meaning that is the perception of the political world, ultimately in a fictional way, through a distinction between the morally pure and integrated people and the corrupt elites who are morally inferior. Criticism of the elite is a necessary condition for being a populist, but it is not sufficient. Otherwise, anyone criticizing the strengths and order in any country will be populist by definition. Populists are always anti-plural, as well as anti-eminent. They believe that they and only themselves represent the public.⁹⁰

The mass or participatory focus of populist activity is of more direct interest to the public and generally involves the transfer of real political power to the average citizen than is the case for other forms of populism.⁹¹ Thus, this typology of populism puts together two aspects of nationalist politics that are valuable for understanding how contemporary populist politics works. Firstly, it stresses that while populism is generally debated within political structures and is seen as democratic “backsliding”, it is more common, and oppressive regimes can use nationalist mechanisms to legitimize the regime. The typology further highlights the distinction between populist policies that actually affect the electorate and those controlled by political insiders that use populist language with their own purposes. Consequently, it emphasizes more than most populism discussions do the impact of populist politics on government.⁹²

Populist politics can reshape repertoires of political mobilization, particularly in the form of mass social movements and socially engaged party organizations.⁹³ The potential of populist politics to stimulate new modes of civic interaction is increasingly important in an era of reduction in organized political activity, such as participation and party membership. Levitsky and Loxton claims that in unconsolidated democracies, populism can weaken democratic

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).

⁹⁰ Michael J. Boland, *The Cornerstones of Populism: Anti-Elitism and Anti-Pluralism* (SSRN Working Paper No. 4186939, 2020), 3, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4186939>.

⁹¹ Peters and Pierre, “A Typology of Populism”.

⁹² Ibid., 930.

⁹³ Gidron and Bonikowski, *Varieties of Populism*;
Giedo Jansen, *Social Cleavages and Political Choices: Large-Scale Comparisons of Social Class, Religion and Voting Behavior in Western Democracies* (PhD diss., Radboud University Nijmegen, 2011), <https://hdl.handle.net/2066/91235>.

institutions and lead to competing authoritarian regimes.⁹⁴ Pappas suggests that populism is closely connected to political fragmentation and can, under some circumstances, drive party regimes to the brink of failure.⁹⁵ Additionally, populist politics have a constitutive role in political realignment, in which moral distinctions between classes are reshaped and categories of “us” and “them” appear.⁹⁶

On the other hand, Finchelstein puts forward that populism is hostile to constitutionalism, values, and mechanisms.⁹⁷ Wide acceptance is that populists have a negative approach to the will of the majority, control and balance mechanisms, protection of minorities and even fundamental rights. As Urbinati emphasizes, populist leaders aim to establish an unmediated relationship between themselves and “the people” by undermining judicial systems, legislatures, and independent media.⁹⁸ While in power, they reinterpret constitutionalism as an injunction to act on behalf of the people’s legitimacy, rather than a set of restrictions. Therefore, populists are less critical of constitutionalism if it can be reframed to support their claims that it truly represents the people.⁹⁹ A fundamental paradox of populist rule in modern democracies is posed by this contradictory relationship with constitutionalism, which both evokes and undermines it.

Accordingly, populists want a direct and indirect relationship between the leader and the public. When they come to power, populists become less skeptical about constitutionalism as an obstacle to what they interpret as the will of the people. The popular will, which was never empirically given but built morally, must be determined by populists and embedded in the constitution.¹⁰⁰ Populists want to immortalize the true image of the morally pure people and then build appropriate policies with their own understanding of the people.¹⁰¹ As long as elections continue to be held in populist regimes, the opposition will have a chance to win, and

⁹⁴ Steven Levitsky and James Loxton, “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism: The Case of Fujimori’s Peru,” in *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy*, ed. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 160–181.

⁹⁵ Takis S. Pappas, “Why Greece Failed,” *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013): 31–45.

⁹⁶ Stefano Fella and Carlo Ruzza, “Conclusion: Understanding European Anti-Racisms,” in *Anti-Racist Movements in the EU: Between Europeanisation and National Trajectories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 209–240.

⁹⁷ Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History*, 140.

⁹⁸ Nadia Urbinati, “Political Theory of Populism,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (2019): 111–27.

⁹⁹ Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). ; Müller, *What Is Populism?*

¹⁰⁰ Neil Walker, “Populism and Constitutional Tension,” *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 17, no. 2 (2019): 515–535.

¹⁰¹ Colin McKibben, “Populism on the Periphery of Democracy: Moralism and Recognition Theory,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 26, no. 6 (2023): 897–917.

pluralism will not be completely suppressed. If the opposition wins elections, these populist constitutions will lead to serious constitutional conflicts. Simply put, the basic promise of populism is that the people can rule. Populists say, at least theoretically, that the public not only possesses a common and consistent will, but also the public can go into administration as the execution of this will through the binding power of attorney given to the right representatives.

1.3. Finding a place to Populism in International Relations¹⁰²

In recent years, populism as an ideology or a discourse in international relations has played a key role in policy-making processes of states. The notion leads policies either in the shape of discourse, as an ideology, or as a political strategy. As populists seize executive and legislative powers, the consequences of their rise become more important for international politics. While populist parties can influence foreign policy as junior partners in coalition governments or by shaping political discourse when in opposition, the election of populist leaders and the formation of populist governments will have a much more direct impact on the foreign policy of states and therefore on world politics. Populism carries in essence, anti-elite, pro-people, and general will frames, the populist leader uses these frames to legitimize the selection of roles to play internationally.¹⁰³ Certain viewpoints assert that populist governments pose a threat to multilateralism, free trade, and even the global liberal order itself.¹⁰⁴ This might create unwanted effects on countries' places in the globalized world.

As a political tactic, an ideology, or a kind of language, populism directs policy.¹⁰⁵ Politics, in the eyes of populists, is fundamentally driven by a struggle between the “corrupt elite” and the “pure people”.¹⁰⁶ They oppose political plurality and see government as a common-sense application of common will.¹⁰⁷ This rationale extends to foreign policy. In international politics,

¹⁰²This part of the study is mainly based on the author's earlier articles namely: Özyüksel, “Populism in Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process”; Özyüksel, “Foreign Policy Decision-Making Processes in the Frame of Populism”.

¹⁰³ Özyüksel, “Foreign Policy Decision-Making Processes”.

¹⁰⁴Müller, *What Is Populism*; Rosa Balfour et al., *Europe's Troublemakers: The Populist Challenge to Foreign Policy* (Brussels: European Policy Centre, 2016).

¹⁰⁵ Gidron and Bonikowski, *Varieties of Populism*.

¹⁰⁶ Cas Mudde, “An Ideational Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 27–47.

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, ed. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 25–44;

Daniele Caramani, “Will vs. Reason: The Populist and Technocratic Forms of Political Representation and Their Critique to Party Government,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017): 54–67,

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000538>; Paul Blokker, “Populism as a Constitutional Project,”

International Journal of Constitutional Law 17, no. 2 (2019): 536–553; Attila Bartha, Zsolt Boda, and Dorottya

populist parties’, and their leaders’ views are sometimes imprecise and varied, not least since populism is typically associated with opposing political philosophies, from the far right to the far left.

The concept of populism exhibits a duality in its conceptualization, characterized either as a thin-centered ideology^{108 109} or as a discourse¹¹⁰, embodying a mode of political identification that formulates and imparts significance to the “people” as an active political entity.¹¹¹ Consonant with this ideational framework, populism manifests as a discursive praxis, wherein communal identities materialize and concretize through the utilization of binary dichotomies and confrontations, particularly evident in the contrasting notions of “corrupt elites” and the “pure people”.¹¹² The characterization of the “elites” extends beyond individuals with divergent priorities and values, exploring the realm of being morally “malevolent”. In international relations populist leaders undertake the task of not only challenging the public legitimacy and personal principles of these elites but also casting doubts upon their material interests.¹¹³ Nevertheless, this created concept of enemies, the “elites”, is still highly dependent on the situation. There is a natural difficulty in defining the boundaries of these categories, as it is not always clear who is an “adversary” or a “friend” in different contexts.¹¹⁴ The “elites”, forming a uniform and foundational antithesis to the populace, serve as a reflective counterpart to the very essence embodied by populist leaders, namely, the collective identity of the people themselves.¹¹⁵ The concept of people is a flexible construction for leader manipulation – it may allude to the people as sovereign, to identify the nation while excluding the elite, and/or to identify the ordinary people. Populist leaders’ confidence arises from the illusion that they

Szikra, “When Populist Leaders Govern: Conceptualising Populism in Policy Making,” *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 3 (2020): 71–81, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i3.2922>.

¹⁰⁸ A “thin” ideology conception of populism, which attributes populist parties’ electoral success to anti-elite and people-centric appeals that resonate with voters holding populist attitudes. (Fabian G. Neuner and Christopher Wratil, “The Populist Marketplace: Unpacking the Role of ‘Thin’ and ‘Thick’ Ideology,” *Political Behavior* 44, no. 2 (2022): 551–574.)

¹⁰⁹ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”.

¹¹⁰ Ernesto Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name?,” in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005b), 32–49.

¹¹¹ Francisco Panizza, ed., *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2005).

¹¹² Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005a);

Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

¹¹³ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 84.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ María Esperanza Casullo, “How to Become a Leader: Identifying Global Repertoires for Populist Leadership,” in *Populism and World Politics: Exploring Inter- and Transnational Dimensions*, ed. F.A. Stengel, D. MacDonald, and D. Nabers (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 55–72, at 57.

understand what the people want and deserve, and that this understanding reflects the general will.¹¹⁶

While populism carries in essence, anti-elite, pro-people, and general will frames, the populist leader uses these frames to legitimize the selection of roles to play internationally. The role conceptions under populist leadership are informed by a thick ideology, such as neoliberalism or socialism, or a thin ideology, such as nationalism.¹¹⁷ Populism in this dissertation is dealt with mainly through the ideational prism in terms of a “thin-centered ideology” consisting of a triadic structure: the people, the elite, and the general will. The approach is not used dogmatically, though. Instead of confining populism to one meaning, this research applies the thin-centered ideology tool of analysis in examining how foreign policy discourse is built by populist leaders, especially in the contexts of elections. The use of this tool of analysis allows for the analysis of their rhetoric while not ignoring the complexities of populism both as political reasoning and a style of speech.

Populism, as expressed by Holliday, encompasses a simultaneous reconfiguration of both domestic and international dimensions.¹¹⁸ In essence, populists engage in an ongoing process of redefining their interactions with their own citizenry and with antagonistic entities, both within local contexts and on a global scale. The assertion by populists to represent the untainted populace in opposition to a tainted elite and the prevailing establishment constitutes an assertion of ascendancy over a distinct socioeconomic stratum.¹¹⁹ This populist paradigm delineates borders and designates affiliation both internally and externally.¹²⁰

Populism is no longer a uniquely American or European phenomenon but has become a global political tactic. Politicians like India’s Narendra Modi, Türkiye’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez successfully consolidated strong popular bases by deploying a combination of personal charisma, strategic use of the mass media, and rhetoric against the

¹¹⁶ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”;

Francisco Panizza, ed., *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*.

¹¹⁷ Albert W. Dzur and Carolyn M. Hendriks, “Thick Populism: Democracy-Enhancing Popular Participation,” *Policy Studies* 39, no. 3 (2018): 334–351;

Ben Stanley, “The Thin Ideology of Populism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 1 (2008): 95–110;

Ralph Schroeder, “The Dangerous Myth of Populism as a Thin Ideology,” *Populism* 3, no. 1 (2020): 13–28, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25888072-02021042>.

¹¹⁸ Shabnam J. Holliday, “Populism, the International and Methodological Nationalism: Global Order and the Iran–Israel Nexus,” *Political Studies* 68, no. 1 (2020): 3–19.

¹¹⁹ Hisarlıoğlu et al., “Contesting the ‘Corrupt Elites,’ Creating the ‘Pure People,’” *International Studies Review* 24, no. 1 (2022): viab052.

¹²⁰ Ayşe Zarakol, “Theorising Hierarchies,” in *Hierarchies in World Politics*, ed. Ayşe Zarakol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1–24, at 7.

elites. It is important to note that not all politicians who criticize elites can be labeled populists. In the cases of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Viktor Orbán, populism has influenced foreign policy alignments and domestic politics. The centralized and individualized foreign policy decision-making procedures of these nations contrast sharply with more institutional, non-populist political systems. The foreign policy ambitions of populist regimes often reflect nationalist agendas and strategically use international forums to bolster domestic legitimacy.¹²¹

Following the discussion on the definitions of populism and its relationship with international relations, the phenomenon needs to be integrated into international relations theories. Many classical international relations theories, such as classical realism, idealism, liberalism and nationalism, can include populism in their frameworks. However, since populism is inherently ambiguous, it requires a theoretical approach that can manage and embrace this uncertainty. In this context, as will be explained in detail in the following sections of this study, neorealism, constructivism, and poststructuralism offer fertile ground and significant potential for adapting to contemporary populism in the global arena.

1.4. Populism's Place among International Relations Theories

The primary theoretical framework used in this dissertation is poststructuralism. While constructivism and neorealism remain useful for contextualizing social meanings and systemic constraints, they are treated here as secondary, comparative perspectives. Poststructuralism best aligns with the study's focus and methodology because it focuses on how foreign policy discourse creates the identities, boundaries, and "truths" that support populist rule. While neorealism and constructivism are briefly mentioned to ground the analysis, the framework instead examines how leaders discursively (re)produce the people/elite opposition, establish boundaries for themselves/others in global politics, and transform emotions into political authority. Poststructuralist International Relations views populist leaders not as logical actors responding to structural constraints, but as discursive actors who produce political meaning. Foreign policy discourses are among the primary tools they use to define the people and the elite, distinguish between us and them, and translate collective emotions such as pride, fear, and resentment into foreign policy narratives. Poststructuralism, therefore, offers a coercive outlook for understanding how discourse shapes reality and how populist leaders like Erdoğan and

¹²¹ Özyüksel, *Foreign Policy Decision-Making Processes*.

Orbán use foreign policy discourse to legitimize political action, reproduce power relations, and shape identity.

1.4.1. Poststructuralism and Populist International Relations

Poststructuralism is a critical approach that emphasizes the central role of discourse, meaning, and power relations in international relations theory.¹²² This theory treats the international system not as a fixed structure but as a process that is constantly reconstructed by discourses and power relations.¹²³ Populist leaders challenge prevailing “regimes of truth” by offering alternative discourses that undermine liberal internationalism and inspire the masses at home.¹²⁴ In this respect, poststructuralism offers a unique tool for understanding the actions and discourses of populist leaders in international relations. This study draws on poststructuralism to examine how populist foreign policy discourses, particularly those of Erdoğan and Orbán, redefine the concepts of sovereignty, nationhood, and order.

While populist international relations emphasizes discursive construction process, poststructuralism offers a suitable theoretical framework for analyzing the functioning of this process. According to the poststructuralist approach, international order is an area dominated by certain systems of truth and rhetoric.¹²⁵ Populist leaders are actors who challenge these systems of truth and offer alternative discourses. In this context, populist international relations not only challenges existing international norms and rules but also tries to reconstruct the meaning of these norms and rules. The leadership of Erdoğan and Orbán provides concrete examples of this process. While Erdoğan created the narrative that the West follows “double standards” and is an “anti-Muslim” power^{126 127}, Orbán described the EU as “a threat to Hungarian sovereignty”^{128 129}. These discourses question the existing normative order in the

¹²² Rian Dermawan, “Poststructuralism and Its Practical Relevance in International Politics,” *Jurnal Asia Pacific Studies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 121–29.

¹²³ Baumann, “Poststructuralism in International Relations”.

¹²⁴ Lene Hansen, “R. B. J. Walker and International Relations: Deconstructing a Discipline,” in *The Future of International Relations*, 352–73 (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ İletişim Başkanlığı, *Stratcom Summit '23* (Ankara: İletişim Başkanlığı, 2023), 49, https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/images/uploads/dosyalar/Stratcom2023_EN.pdf.

¹²⁷ Didem Aydındağ, “The Role of Language in Power and Politics (Case Study: Erdoğan Speeches between 2002–2020),” *Revista EntreLinguas* (2021).

¹²⁸ Eszter Babarczy, “Media’s Role in Promoting Nationalism,” *PEN/Opp*, September 22, 2016, <https://www.penopp.org/articles/medias-role-promoting-nationalism>.

¹²⁹ Jörg Dieringer, Beáta Mikola, and Petra Guasti, *Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024: Hungary Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024), 3, https://www.sgi-network.org/docs/2024/country/SGI2024_Hungary.pdf.

international system besides allowing populist leaders to redefine their national interests and identity against this order.

Poststructuralism offers a critical analysis of the meanings used by populist leaders in their language and the effects of these meanings on international relations. This analysis reveals that discourse is the instrument of power and shapes power relations in the international system.¹³⁰ The discourses of Erdoğan and Orbán can be used not only to mobilize domestic political supporters, but also to redefine their positions in the international system. In this context, poststructuralism offers a fundamental theoretical framework for understanding how populist international relations transform power and knowledge relations. Therefore, this work views populist international relations as a discursive and psychological process rather than a structural or normative one.

Populist international relations are closely related to poststructuralism's emphasis on discourse, power, and the regime of justice. An analytical framework that enables analyzing the connections among nationalism, populism, and foreign policy may be built by utilizing insights from poststructuralist theory. The populist idea of the people, like the state or nation, can be an ontological referent that is (re)constructed through foreign policy discourse, even though poststructuralist international relations has demonstrated how foreign policy discourse creates and reproduces the state by setting it apart from other international others.¹³¹

It is possible to examine how populist actors can utilize foreign policy as a space for the (re)production of their claims to represent the people since poststructuralist international relations views foreign policy as a practice of creating borders that divide the self from the other.¹³² A discursive approach to populism draws on Ernesto Laclau's theoretical framework and sees populism as a strategy that combines different social grievances into a collective identity of the "people" represented by a populist actor.¹³³ This identity is constructed against a common enemy, the "establishment", which is blamed for obstructing the fulfillment of these

¹³⁰ Anna Holzscheiter, "Between Communicative Interaction and Structures of Signification: Discourse Theory and Analysis in International Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 15, no. 2 (2014): 142–62.; Frank A. Stengel and Dirk Nabers, "Symposium: The Contribution of Laclau's Discourse Theory to International Relations and International Political Economy Introduction," *New Political Science* 41 (2019): 248–62.

¹³¹ Thorsten Wojczewski, "Trump, Populism, and American Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16, no. 3 (2020): 292–311.

¹³² Thorsten Wojczewski, "Populism, Hindu Nationalism, and Foreign Policy in India: The Politics of Representing 'the People'," *International Studies Review* 22, no. 3 (2020): 396–422, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viz007>.

¹³³ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

demands. In contrast to the thin-centered ideology perspective, the discursive approach focuses on the processes of constructing sociopolitical categories such as “the people” and distinguishes between populist and nationalist identity formations by examining practices of differentiation and othering. This framework intersects with poststructuralist international relations theory, which interprets foreign policy as a practice of drawing boundaries.¹³⁴

The poststructuralist approach offers a relational understanding of identities, showing that identities are inherently unstable and incomplete, but can be constructed and implemented against another’s difference.¹³⁵ States do not have an internal nature outside of these processes and are instead continually modified by different activities.¹³⁶ By drawing distinctions between “inside” and “outside” or “self” and “other”, foreign policy plays a key role in this identity-making process and makes the state possible.¹³⁷ This procedure also emphasizes that a state or country has no objective essence because language creates its meanings.¹³⁸ Additionally, foreign policies both rely on and reproduce representations of identity.¹³⁹ In this hierarchical construction, the state is framed as a secure and ordered space in contrast to the “foreign” or “international”, characterized by anarchy and insecurity.¹⁴⁰

Without simplifying the idea of identity and legitimizing populist-nationalist demands, the poststructuralist approach can explain the importance of identity in right-wing populist politics and its relationship with foreign policy by emphasizing the relational perspective of identity.¹⁴¹ A poststructuralist perspective offers a critical framework for examining the meaning and effects of these discourses. Discourse is not only a means of communication, but also a means of power. Erdoğan’s and Orbán’s discourses are, on the one hand, a tool for communicating with their supporters at the national level, and on the other hand, for redefining their relations with other players in the international system. Poststructuralism makes it possible to understand

¹³⁴ Wojczewski, “Trump, Populism, and American Foreign Policy,” 414.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 415.

¹³⁶ David Campbell, “Why Fight: Humanitarianism, Principles, and Post-Structuralism,” *Millennium* 27, no. 3 (1998).

¹³⁷ Campbell, “Why Fight: Humanitarianism, Principles, and Post-Structuralism”.

¹³⁸ Nabers, “Filling the Void of Meaning”, 192.

¹³⁹ Lene Hansen, “Discourse Analysis, Identity, and Foreign Policy,” in *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006), 15–32.

¹⁴⁰ Richard K. Ashley, “The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics,” *Alternatives* 12, no. 4 (1987): 403–34.

¹⁴¹ Wojczewski, “Trump, Populism, and American Foreign Policy,” 415.

the power relations behind these discourses and how these relations are reproduced.¹⁴² The discourse of populist leaders creates a justice system that questions power relations and normative order in the international system.¹⁴³ This regime not only consolidates the power of populist leaders but also reshapes the legitimacy of the international system. Poststructuralist analysis critically examines the meanings inherent in the discourses of populist leaders and explores how these leaders see and attempt to change the international system. The examples of Erdoğan and Orbán represent two important cases in which this analysis can be concretely applied. Through the discourses of both leaders, they redefined their country in the international system, and in the process created new meanings that questioned international norms.

1.4.2. A Neorealist Perspective on Populist International Relations

In the study of international relations, neorealism emphasizes the structural constraints of the anarchic international system and the primacy of state security and power. It is based on the assumption that states act as rational, unitary actors, driven by self-interest and survival.¹⁴⁴ But the rise of right-wing populist leadership in recent decades has posed significant challenges to the neorealist model by disrupting traditional understandings of state behavior. Populist leaders, known for their nationalist language and “us” versus “them” rhetoric, have transformed the relationship between domestic politics and international relations by reinterpreting structural pressures through an ideological prism. The neorealist framework for understanding the foreign policies of populist leaders makes it possible to analyze the systemic pressures that shape the policies of these leaders by focusing on the structures of the international system.¹⁴⁵ However, the way populist leaders perceive and respond to the international system requires a more complex and multidimensional use of neorealism’s analytical power.

Neorealism, or structural realism, as formulated by Waltz, argues that the international system is defined by anarchy, the absence of overarching authority, and that states are rational actors

¹⁴² Baumann, “Poststructuralism in International Relations”. ; Frøy Thule Skøld, *Writing the Post-9/11 Reality* (bachelor’s thesis, Norwegian University of Science and Technology [NTNU], 2019),

<https://ntnuopen.ntnu.no/ntnu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2613643/no.ntnu%3Ainspera%3A2310376.pdf?sequence=1>.

¹⁴³ Deborah Barros Leal Farias, Guilherme Casarões, and Daniel F. Wajner, “Populist International (Dis)Order? Lessons from World-Order Visions in Latin American Populism,” *International Affairs* 100, no. 5 (2024): 2003–24. ; Amitai Etzioni, “The Rise of a (More) Nation-Centered System,” *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 42 (2018): 29.

¹⁴⁴ Javad Dehghani Firoozabadi and Mohammad Zahir Ashkezari, “Neo-Classical Realism in International Relations,” *Asian Social Science* 12 (2016): 95.

¹⁴⁵ Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* 51, no. 2 (1998): 144–72.

trying to ensure their survival in a competitive environment.¹⁴⁶ Neorealism emphasizes two fundamental principles: the first is the distribution of power. Accordingly, the balance of power among states determines their relative security and position within the international system.¹⁴⁷ The second is the unitary state hypothesis. It assumes that states are treated as unitary actors and that domestic politics and ideological differences are considered secondary to systemic pressures.¹⁴⁸ Neorealism explains phenomena such as alliances, arms races, and conflicts through the logic of maximizing power and security.¹⁴⁹ However, it tends to ignore the internal dynamics of states, including the role of ideology, leadership and political psychology, which can significantly influence foreign policy behavior.¹⁵⁰

Populist leaders often use the anarchic nature of the international system and the balance of power dynamics to legitimize their political agenda.¹⁵¹ In this context, neorealist theory provides a basis for analyzing the concepts of “power struggle” and “sovereignty” that are often emphasized in the discourses and policies of populist leaders. When the cases of Erdoğan and Orbán are analyzed in terms of this theoretical framework, it is seen that both leaders display a critical attitude towards the existing structure of the international system and transform the systemic pressures of this structure into a foreign policy understanding that prioritizes national interests. These leaders can use psychological dynamics such as fear and group identification to ensure their power, for example, by portraying foreign actors as an existential threat to the country, they create powerful in-group and out-group dynamics that appeal to their domestic followers. Using psychologically agreeable nationalist language, they can strategically support measures that are compatible with their ideological goals and the structural constraints of the international system. Although neorealism’s focus is on systemic forces¹⁵², by integrating concepts from political psychology a more comprehensive understanding of how populist leaders’ emotional and cognitive responses to these pressures influence their foreign policy decisions can be examined. This combination highlights the interplay between the international system and individual-level motivations that drive populist rule on the global stage.

¹⁴⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

¹⁴⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Globalization and Governance,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 32, no. 4 (1999): 693–700.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, updated ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

¹⁵⁰ Robert O. Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹⁵¹ Hisarhoğlu et al., “Contesting the ‘Corrupt Elites,’ Creating the ‘Pure People’”.

¹⁵² Stephen D. Krasner, “Power Politics, Institutions, Transnational Relations,” *Cambridge Studies in International Relations* 42, no. 1 (1995): 257.

While neorealism views systemic pressures as the primary drivers of state behavior (Wendt, 1994), populist leaders often reinterpret these pressures through a national ideological lens. This creates tension between the structural determinism of neorealism¹⁵³ and the agency of populist leadership. For example, Orbán frames the EU and immigration from Muslim countries as existential threats to Hungarian sovereignty and identity.¹⁵⁴ While neorealism might predict that Hungary would align with stronger powers to maximize security, Orbán’s rhetoric emphasizes resistance to EU norms and values, privileging national populist narratives over systemic calculations. As for Turkish case, Erdoğan’s foreign policy reflects a mix of populism and neo-Ottomanism¹⁵⁵, challenging Western alliances like North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) while engaging in aggressive regional strategies, e.g., in Syria, Libya, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Erdoğan’s rhetoric often portrays the West as a hostile “them” seeking to undermine Türkiye’s sovereignty, which shapes his conflictual stance.¹⁵⁶ These cases reveal how populist leaders reinterpret systemic pressures to align with their domestic political agendas, using foreign policy as a platform to reinforce their authority and ideological narratives.

Neorealists argue that ideas of national security and sovereignty often serve as the basis for the actions of populist leaders in foreign affairs.¹⁵⁷ Erdoğan emphasizes the goal of strengthening Türkiye’s position as a regional power in the international system and aims to do so by exploiting power imbalances and systemic contingencies.¹⁵⁸ Türkiye’s growing influence in the

¹⁵³ Brian C. Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism,” *Security Studies* 17 (2008): 294–321.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Sata, “Performing Crisis to Create Your Enemy: Europe vs. the EU in Hungarian Populist Discourse,” *Frontiers in Political Science* 5 (2023): 1032470, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2023.1032470>.

¹⁵⁵ Alper Kaliber and Esra Kaliber, “From De-Europeanisation to Anti-Western Populism: Turkish Foreign Policy in Flux,” *The International Spectator* 54, no. 1 (2019): 1–16. ; Ümit Nazmi Hazır, “Anti-Westernism in Turkey’s Neo-Ottomanist Foreign Policy under Erdoğan,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 20, no. 2 (78) (2022): 164–83.

¹⁵⁶ Oğuzhan Göksel, “Foreign Policy Making in the Age of Populism: The Uses of Anti-Westernism in Turkish Politics,” *New Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁵⁷ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, “Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy,” in *The Realism Reader*, 253–58 (London: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁵⁸ Emel Parlar Dal, “Conceptualising and Testing the ‘Emerging Regional Power’ of Turkey in the Shifting International Order,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (2016): 1425–53.

Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean¹⁵⁹ and Africa¹⁶⁰ can be read not only as a geopolitical strategy but also as part of a power struggle in the international system. Orbán, on the other hand, has defined Hungary that resists the pressures of the international system and framed the EU¹⁶¹ in particular as a systemic threat. Orbán's discourses focus on the relationship between national sovereignty and systemic threats and reflect Hungary's efforts to maintain a balance of power against these threats.

Neorealism's ability to analyze populist leaders' responses to the anarchic nature of the international system¹⁶² is what makes it effective in understanding populist international relations. The case leaders challenge these demands for a reinterpretation of their position within the international system, while using it as a basis for prioritizing their national interests. The dynamics of the international system have been used by Erdoğan and Orbán as a tool and a strategic opportunity to strengthen their populist discourse. In this context, neorealist theory provides a vital framework for understanding how both systemic forces and strategic choices made by populist leaders influence their foreign policy actions. Neorealist perspective can be usefully applied to populist international relations for understanding the structural dynamics of the international system and how these are reflected in the decision-making processes of populist leaders. As a result, when paired with a comprehensive theoretical approach, the neorealist paradigm might even offer a great analytical capacity for understanding the political psychology of populist international relations. The neorealist approach allows for a thorough analysis of how leaders like Erdoğan and Orbán navigate the international system's balance of power dynamics.

Populist foreign policy can be understood by breaking through the narrow confines of neorealism and by instead drawing together structural variables and political psychology.

¹⁵⁹ Ebru Oğurlu, *Rising Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy* (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali [IAI], 2012). ; Mustafa Burak Şener, "The Eastern Mediterranean Triangle: Cooperation Among Regional States.", <https://pea.lib.pte.hu/bitstream/handle/pea/34635/mediterranean202202.pdf?sequence=1>.; Mustafa Burak Şener, "Evaluation of Maximalism over the Claims of Actors in the Eastern Mediterranean," in *Proceedings of the Absolute Alkalmazott Bölcsészeti Konferencia VI*, 13–28 (2023).

¹⁶⁰ Abdirahman Ali, "Turkey's Foray into Africa: A New Humanitarian Power?," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 4 (2011): 65.; Ambassador Tom Wheeler, "Ankara to Africa: Turkey's Outreach since 2005," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2011): 43–62.

¹⁶¹ Agnes Batory, "Populists in Government? Hungary's 'System of National Cooperation,'" *Democratization* 23 (2016): 283–303.

¹⁶² Robert Powell, "Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate," *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994): 313–44. ; Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391–425.

Populist foreign policymakers tend also to personalize decision-making and frequently interpret foreign pressure in emotive, rather than structural, terms. Political psychology can account for the role of emotion, whether in the form of pride or fear, as well as identity-based mobilization, in rallying popular enthusiasm. When paired with the international system's structural forces, this allows a more complete explanation of how foreign policymakers who are populist operate in relation to both domestic pressure and foreign constraints.

1.4.3. Populist International Relations from a Constructivist Perspective

The study of international relations has historically been dominated by ideas of liberalism and realism, although constructivism started to gain traction in the late 1980s. Writers of this era were well-prepared to take into account events around the end of the Cold War and questioned the materialism and individualism that supported realism theory.¹⁶³ Additional contributions were able to clarify the ways in which identity and norms influence state objectives, which helped to explain realism-related problems such military interventions and the change of great powers.¹⁶⁴ By emphasizing that states cannot be isolated from a framework of meaning that affects their identities and interests, constructivists challenge the individualistic ideas that constitute standard ontologies of the state and instead focus on a social ontology.¹⁶⁵ Contrary to traditional theories that assume that governments pursue permanent values such as money and power, constructivists emphasize that the fundamental elements of international relations are created in accordance with their historical and social contexts. Furthermore, constructivists have provided greater insight into the factors underlying state power by indicating that it includes ideational elements in addition to material capacities as emphasized by realism.¹⁶⁶

Populist international relations also has a connection with constructivist perspectives on identity, norms, and social structure. This theory argues that populist leaders' actions in the international system are not only strategic but also normative and identity based.¹⁶⁷ In this context, constructivist analysis offers a promising framework for understanding how populism emerges in the international system and challenges its normative structure. This approach

¹⁶³ Lena Johanna Kappenberg, "National Identity and the Construction of Enemies: Constructivism and Populism," *E-International Relations (E-IR) Publication* 27 (2019) <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/01/27/national-identity-and-the-construction-of-enemies-constructivism-and-populism/>

¹⁶⁴ Michael Barnett, "Social Constructivism," in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁶⁵ K. Fierke, "Constructivism," in *International Relations Theory: Discipline and Diversity*, 4th ed., ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 161–76.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Kappenberg, "National Identity and the Construction of Enemies".

emphasizes how identities, norms, and values influence state behavior. Because populist discourse and policies are heavily based on identity, otherness, and normative frameworks¹⁶⁸, this theory is a useful tool for understanding the foreign policy steps of populist leaders. A constructivist perspective can be set as a ground under the distinction between “us” and “them” that populist politicians use in their discourse. This division impacts foreign policy opposition and domestic political polarization. On tangible elements such as power and economic interests, international relations are shaped by social structures and shared meanings¹⁶⁹ that can be understood using a constructivist perspective. Thus, constructivism can be used as a key theoretical tool in the study of populist international relations. Indeed, besides particular policies, populist leaders construct social meanings through national identity, moral frameworks, and divisions between “us” and “them”.

According to constructivist theory, the international system is not only an anarchic structure; it is continuously constructed through social interactions and shared meanings among states.¹⁷⁰ Constructivists argue that identity-building is an intersubjective process in which people jointly create their own identities and ideational and normative frameworks.¹⁷¹ In this context, populist international relations clearly reveal this process of social construction in the discourses and actions of leaders. The constructivist perspective on how ideational structures influence actors’ assessments of the value of material resources shows how populists use identity construction to portray circumstances as threats to their constituents’ interests.¹⁷² As the main cases of this work, Türkiye and Hungary are two examples where this process is clearly seen. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Viktor Orbán have attempted to create alternative normative frameworks and identities by questioning the norms and actors of the international system.¹⁷³ This process can be seen as an attempt to redefine the normative structure of the international community rather

¹⁶⁸ Inari Sakki and Katarina Pettersson, “Discursive Constructions of Otherness in Populist Radical Right Political Blogs,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 46, no. 2 (2016): 156–70. ; Wojczewski, “Populism, Hindu Nationalism, and Foreign Policy in India”.; İhsan Çetin, “The Concept of Us and Them: Communitarianism and the Rise of Populist Politics,” *Sociologia* 38 (2019): 30–51.

¹⁶⁹ Jeffrey T. Checkel, “The Constructive Turn in International Relations Theory,” *World Politics* 50, no. 2 (1998): 324–48.

¹⁷⁰ John Gerard Ruggie, “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 855–85.

¹⁷¹ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 171–200.

¹⁷² Kappenberg, “National Identity and the Construction of Enemies”.

¹⁷³ Hisarlıoğlu et al., “Contesting the ‘Corrupt Elites,’ Creating the ‘Pure People’”.

than adapting to it. Erdoğan has defined Türkiye as the “defender of the oppressed”¹⁷⁴ and the “leader of the Muslim world”, while Orbán has positioned Hungary as the “last bastion of Christian Europe”.¹⁷⁵ These identities not only strengthen their domestic political support but also allow them to redefine their place in the international system. A constructivist framework provides a fundamental tool for understanding the dynamics of this process and for analyzing the role that populist leaders play in the social structure of the international system.

Populist leaders redefine their roles in the international system through identity creation.¹⁷⁶ Erdoğan’s foreign policy largely involves building an identity rooted in the Ottoman past and gaining regional leadership through it.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, this new conception of identity, presented as a “vision of a new Türkiye”, can be added to the perspective of building a new nation.¹⁷⁸ This is not only a geopolitical strategy, but also a constructed identity and set of meanings. A structural analysis helps to understand how this discourse questions international norms and legitimizes Erdoğan’s foreign policy actions. Similarly, Orbán’s anti-European rhetoric and his description of Hungary as the “last bastion of Christian Europe” also reflect an effort to create an identity at the national and international level. This discourse is used to challenge liberal norms and emphasize national sovereignty.

The way voters’ identities are constructed in contrast to the identities of perceived opponents is a central emphasis of a constructivist analysis of a populist leader’s stance on issues such as foreign powers or immigration. Moreover, this identity is constructed in ways that support interests that serve the demand for national identity preservation and security. Language is also important because the leader evokes a sense of threat to national interests by using specific terms for the opposing identities of the political elite and refugees.¹⁷⁹ Consequently, the constructivist framework examines how populist leaders understand and try to rethink the

¹⁷⁴ İletişim Başkanlığı. (2020, October 25). Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Bugün Türkiye, dünyanın her yerindeki toplumların gönüllerinde, mazlumların hamisi, hakkın ve adaletin savunucusu olarak taht kurmuştur. İletişim Başkanlığı. <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-Erdoğan-bugun-turkiye-dunyanin-her-yerindeki-toplumlarin-gonullerinde-mazlumlarin-hamisi-hakkin-ve-adaletin-savunucusu-olarak-taht-kurmudur>

¹⁷⁵ Telex. (2022, May 16). *Orbán: “Hungary has become the last Christian-conservative bastion of the Western world”*. Telex. <https://telex.hu/english/2022/05/16/Orbán-hungary-has-become-the-last-christian-conservative-bastion-of-the-western-world>

¹⁷⁶ Hisarlıoğlu et al., “Contesting the ‘Corrupt Elites,’ Creating the ‘Pure People’”.

¹⁷⁷ Aylin Ş. Görener and Meltem Ş. Ucal, “The Personality and Leadership Style of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy,” *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 3 (2011): 357–81.

¹⁷⁸ Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and Elif Gençkal Eroler, “Spatial Constructions of Homeland in Turkish National Identity: Exclusion and Inclusion of Europe,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 20, no. 77 (2023): 17–33.

¹⁷⁹ Kappenberg, “National Identity and the Construction of Enemies”.

normative order of the international system. Erdoğan's and Orbán's statements challenge established international conventions by creating alternative identities and frameworks. These strategies are based on the constructivist understanding that identities and norms are not fixed but constantly negotiated. The discourses of populist leaders show that foreign policy actions are not only strategic but also meaning-based.¹⁸⁰ These reports allow leaders to redefine their position in the international system.

¹⁸⁰ Sandra Destradi, Johannes Plagemann, and Hakkı Taş, "Populism and the Politicisation of Foreign Policy," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 24, no. 3 (2022): 475–92. ; Péter Visnovitz and Erin Kristin Jenne, "Populist Argumentation in Foreign Policy: The Case of Hungary under Viktor Orbán, 2010–2020," *Comparative European Politics* 19, no. 6 (2021): 683.

CHAPTER 2. POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF POPULIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Political psychology of populist international relations can be comprehended through the examination of the role of values, beliefs, and feelings of belonging as well as the leaders' personality trait and their decision-making processes especially in their countries' foreign policies. Foreign policy and domestic policy have become areas that cannot be separated from each other. The rationale and purpose of studying the political psychology of populist international relations in this particular study, through the selected populist leaders' discourses during specific election times in the frame of foreign policy making, is that international relations are narrowed down to the steps and decisions taken by states in their foreign policies. Multinational companies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, which have become parts of the international system with globalization, are also structures created because of states deciding to establish alliances and collaborations as foreign policy steps. In other words, today's international relations are a network of relations that should not be considered separately from the steps taken by states and their decision-makers in foreign policy-making processes. States, decision makers, and leaders in particular in Türkiye and Hungary, which are the subject of this work, shape the foreign policy steps they take and the discourses they construct as a strategy to gain domestic support within the framework of populist ideology. While doing this, they draw a Manichean impression by approaching populism with an ideological rationale and using the distinction between "us" and "them". Thus, by shaping the discourses around "them", "the other", "foreign/external powers" populist leaders use in foreign policy, create the image of heroes who can use the fears and concerns of the citizens and ward off these fears, and convey the rally around the flag message, which is one of the clear discourses of right-wing populism.

The study of international relations and foreign policy has been historically drawn from a wide array of disciplines outside of political science.¹⁸¹ Primary divisions in this field revolve around two main approaches. The first approach concentrates on the structure of the international system, often drawing from economics to developing models, analogies, insights, and metaphors. This approach places a strong emphasis on rational preferences and strategic

¹⁸¹ Ole R. Holsti, "The Political Psychology of International Politics: More than a Luxury," *Political Psychology* 10, no. 3 (1989): 495–500.

considerations, and how they are influenced and constrained by the structure of the international system. In the second approach, decision-making analysts are more concerned with understanding domestic political processes and tend to draw on psychology and social psychology to better understand the limitations and obstacles that shape information processing and decision-making.¹⁸² Both approaches are indeed essential, and relying on either one is insufficient. Ignoring the influence of the international system's structure and constraints can lead to analyses that portray policymakers as highly autonomous decision-makers with an almost unlimited range of choices, restricted solely by their ambitions and available resources. However, structural approaches also have their limitations in several crucial aspects, in that they cannot fully elucidate the nature and origins of interests and preferences, as these are typically influenced by factors beyond the system's structure alone. Ideology, beliefs about international affairs, perceptions of adversaries, and domestic factors often play equally significant roles. Consequently, structural models may not provide a comprehensive understanding of how interests and preferences evolve over time.¹⁸³

Psychological research has made significant contributions to the field of international relations, particularly in areas like deterrence and foreign policy decision-making.¹⁸⁴ Over the past decades, there has been a notable increase in interest in psychology within international relations, even among those traditionally less inclined to incorporate psychological perspectives. Psychology is less likely in international relations to be presented as an initial assumption than it was twenty or thirty years ago, when it was defined solely against a rationalist baseline. Similar to how many criticisms of rational choice are more often directed at specific modeling assumptions than at the central idea of actors behaving according to a particular set of beliefs while facing a certain set of constraints.¹⁸⁵ Many criticisms of political

¹⁸² Ibid., 495.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 496.

¹⁸⁴ Deborah Welch Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985). ; Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). ; Jack S. Levy, "Policy Decision-Making," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd ed., ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 301. ; Janice Gross Stein, "Political Psychology: Deterrence and Conflict," in *Richard Ned Lebow: A Pioneer in International Relations Theory, History, Political Philosophy and Psychology*, 31–34 (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

¹⁸⁵ Duncan Snidal, "Rational Choice and International Relations," in *Handbook of International Relations*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (London: SAGE Publications, 2013), 85–111.

psychology are directed at distinct psychological theories or empirical approaches; psychology, like rational choice, is not sufficiently homogeneous to be proven false in its entirety.¹⁸⁶

Political psychology that predominated in international relations historically concentrated on elites rather than the masses¹⁸⁷, in sharp contrast to psychological work that primarily examined the political behavior of the public rather than political elites.¹⁸⁸ Psychological research in international relations has a fair amount of emphasis on public opinion research.¹⁸⁹ Political scientists initially settled on general foreign policy orientations as the causes of specific foreign policy attitudes because they believed that partisanship talked much less about foreign policy attitudes than domestic counterparts.¹⁹⁰ Psychological techniques in international relations are becoming more and more focused on emotions. This is evident in studies of ethnic conflict¹⁹¹, nuclear proliferation choices¹⁹², bargaining and diplomacy in general.¹⁹³

The broad theories of international relations, including constructivism, liberalism, realism, and post-structuralist theory have formed the discipline's identity since the 1980s. A causally meaningful agency level of psychological components may not only be complimentary but also necessary to account for the significance of the structural factors to the degree that such theories are not dedicated to methodological holism.¹⁹⁴ The literature is not able to explain some parts of any choice without comprehending the psychological dimension of the primary decision-maker(s), particularly the idea that beliefs, cognitive biases, personality, and interpersonal

¹⁸⁶ Joshua D. Kertzer and Dustin Tingley, "Political Psychology in International Relations: Beyond the Paradigms," *Annual Review of Political Science* 21, no. 1 (2018): 319–39.

¹⁸⁷ Donald R. Kinder, "Opinion and Action in the Realm of Politics," in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 4th ed., ed. Daniel T. Gilbert, Susan T. Fiske, and Gardner Lindzey (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 778–867.

¹⁸⁸ Jervis, Lebow, and Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence*. ; Margaret G. Hermann, How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Framework, *International Studies Review*, Volume 3, Issue 2, Summer 2001, Pages 47–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1521-9488.00234>.

¹⁸⁹ Jerel Rosati and Colleen Miller, "Political Psychology, Cognition, and Foreign Policy Analysis," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, January 11, 2018, accessed April 6, 2025, <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-466>.

¹⁹⁰ Kertzer and Tingley, "Political Psychology in International Relations".

¹⁹¹ Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁹² Jacques E. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁹³ Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).; Jonathan Renshon, "Stability and Change in Belief Systems: The Operational Code of George W. Bush," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52 (2008): 820–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002708316496>.

¹⁹⁴ Christer Pursiainen and Tuomas Forsberg, *The Psychology of Foreign Policy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

interactions may play a role.¹⁹⁵ Although this is hardly a groundbreaking finding, it does highlight the issue of when and how psychology matters.

As for the populist international relations' political psychology, the term populism is frequently used to describe an aggressive communication style and straightforward policy recommendations that stem from strong emotions and radical viewpoints, typically held by those on the right of the political spectrum.¹⁹⁶ Despite the frequent reports that populist leaders have a "rougher" communication style¹⁹⁷, populism is more than just of that. Another variation or important development in the scope of research on populism has been greatly expanded by examining the international, transnational, and global aspects of the phenomenon. Previously, scholars focused primarily on the domestic arena, with special attention paid to voter mobilization¹⁹⁸, the populist content of political communication¹⁹⁹, and the political and discursive significance of populist leaders.²⁰⁰ Contrarily, comparative viewpoints tended to ignore broader global interactions, foreign policy, or the field of international security in favor of concentrating on populist movements and political party systems.²⁰¹

The increasing body of research on populism in international relations has highlighted the ways in which populist leaders and parties use populism to form their foreign policy decision-making

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Alessandro Nai, "Fear and Loathing in Populist Campaigns? Comparing the Communication Style of Populists and Non-Populists in Elections Worldwide," *Journal of Political Marketing* 20, no. 2 (2021): 219–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2018.1491439>; Mats Ekström, Marianna Patrona, and Joanna Thornborrow, "Right-Wing Populism and the Dynamics of Style: A Discourse-Analytic Perspective on Mediated Political Performances," *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0101-7>.

¹⁹⁷ Alessandro Nai and Ferran Martínez i Coma, "The Personality of Populists: Provocateurs, Charismatic Leaders, or Drunken Dinner Guests?," *West European Politics* 42, no. 7 (2019): 1337–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1599570>.

¹⁹⁸ Giedo Jansen, *Social Cleavages and Political Choices: Large-Scale Comparisons of Social Class, Religion and Voting Behavior in Western Democracies* (PhD diss., Radboud University Nijmegen, 2011), <https://hdl.handle.net/2066/91235>; Kenneth M. Roberts, "Populism and Political Parties," in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser and Cas Mudde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 287–304.

¹⁹⁹ Jan Jagers and Stefaan Walgrave, "Populism as Political Communication Style: An Empirical Study of Political Parties' Discourse in Belgium," *European Journal of Political Research* 46, no. 3 (2007): 319–45.; Matthijs Rooduijn and Teun Pauwels, "Measuring Populism: Comparing Two Methods of Content Analysis," *West European Politics* 34, no. 6 (2011): 1272–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2011.616711>.

²⁰⁰ Kurt Weyland, "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics," *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/422601>.

²⁰¹ Carlos de la Torre, "Populism in Latin America," in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–25.; Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, eds., *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

processes²⁰² as well as the ways in which populist performances, rhetoric, and beliefs interact with populist discourses and practices. In this context, social constructions of hostility, existential threat, and crisis, along with discursive processes of external and internal othering²⁰³ are particularly noteworthy. Moreover, the populist securitization of immigration and trade policy issues²⁰⁴ plays a significant role, while securitization also shapes populism's aesthetics, rhetoric, and performative style.²⁰⁵ In this context, the concept of securitization, developed by Barry Buzan and his colleagues at the Copenhagen School, offers an important analytical lens for understanding how political actors transform ordinary political issues into existential security concerns.²⁰⁶ Buzan's framework emphasizes the role of "speech acts" through which leaders legitimize extraordinary measures and reinforce the boundary between the "self" and the "other" by declaring certain issues threatening. This approach is particularly important in populist politics, where discursive acts of securitization are used to construct national identity and legitimize exclusionary policies. Finally, the mobilization of ontological (in)security narratives against so-called "enemies of the people"²⁰⁷ further highlights the intersection of populism and securitization. The security imaginaries of populist discourses such as "Hungary First"²⁰⁸, "Stop Brussels"²⁰⁹, and "The world is bigger than five (in Turkish *dünya beşten büyüktür*)"²¹⁰ are based on socio-economic threat, political alienation, and socio-cultural anxiety. These discourses are distinctly non-elitist and represent the common concerns and fears

²⁰² Erin K. Jenne, "Populism, Nationalism, and Revisionist Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 97, no. 2 (2021): 323–43, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa226>; Corina Lacatus and Gustav Meibauer, "'Saying It like It Is': Right-Wing Populism, International Politics, and the Performance of Authenticity," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 24, no. 3 (2022): 437–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481221089137>; Leslie E. Wehner and Cameron G. Thies, "The Nexus of Populism and Foreign Policy: The Case of Latin America," *International Relations* 35, no. 2 (2021): 320–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117820944430>; Özgür Özdamar and Erdem Ceydilek, "European Populist Radical Right Leaders' Foreign Policy Beliefs: An Operational Code Analysis," *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 1 (2020): 137–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119850254>.

²⁰³ Wojcieszewski, "Trump, Populism, and American Foreign Policy".

²⁰⁴ Holland, Jack, and Ben Fermor. "Security and Polarisation in Trump's America: Securitisation and the Domestic Politics of Threatening Others." *Global Affairs* 6, no. 1–0 (2020): 55-70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1734958>.

²⁰⁵ Bohdana Kurylo, "The Discourse and Aesthetics of Populism as Securitisation Style," *International Relations* 36, no. 1 (2022): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117820973071>.

²⁰⁶ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

²⁰⁷ Brent J. Steele and Alexandra Homolar, "Ontological Insecurities and the Politics of Contemporary Populism," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019): 216.

²⁰⁸ About Hungary, "PM Orbán: European Parliamentary Election Will Be about a Struggle for Values and Cultures," *About Hungary*, June 4, 2018, <https://abouthungary.hu/prime-minister/pm-orban-european-parliamentary-election-will-be-about-a-struggle-for-values-and-cultures>.

²⁰⁹ European Commission, "'Stop Brussels': European Commission Responds to Hungarian National Consultation," *European Commission*, April 27, 2017, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/stop-brussels-european-commission-responds-hungarian-national-consultation_en.

²¹⁰ Berdal Aral, "The World Is Bigger than Five," *Insight Turkey* 21, no. 4 (2019): 75.

of the “real people”.²¹¹ Populist performances and discourses emphasize dramatization, personalization, emotionalization, and conflict in their antagonistic framing of policy issues and representation of international politics. They also identify establishment failure and link the existence of a corrupt elite to broader socio-economic and socio-cultural anxieties and insecurities.²¹²

In order to legitimize themselves both domestically and abroad, Wajner contends that modern current populist administrations are becoming more and more eager to export the discursive construction of an adversarial connection between the “people” and the “elites” to regional and international arenas.²¹³ Kinnvall and Svensson, drawing on insights from political psychology, identify the conceptual interplay between internal and external insecurities as a defining characteristic of nationalist populist actors.²¹⁴ Their primary focus is on the psychological and affective mechanisms that underline this process, viewing populism primarily as a source of anxiety that is expressed both in everyday and transnational contexts. In particular, their research of fantasy narratives, emotional governance, and ontological insecurity of far-right populism focuses on gendered and racialized narratives and how they are fueled by emotions of vulnerability, pride, shame, and insecurity.²¹⁵

Although the inclusion of decision-making in international relations is a welcome development in addressing the problem of agent-structure, the agent is still under-theorized, and decades of research on the political psychology of foreign policy readily challenges some of the theory’s tenets. An approach, or frame of reference, can be obtained from a political psychological standpoint, as Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin suggested back in 1954.²¹⁶ An agent-based, psychologically oriented approach provides a unique angle from which to view the world and

²¹¹ Rachel D. Beeman, “What Are the Three Characteristics of Trumpism?: A Discourse Analysis of Trump’s Four Major Campaign Speeches,” *Political Analysis* 19, no. 1 (2018): 2.; Michael Freeden, “After the Brexit Referendum: Revisiting Populism as an Ideology,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 22, no. 1 (2017): 3, 11, DOI: 10.1080/13569317.2016.1260813.

²¹² Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).; Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

²¹³ Daniel F. Wajner, “Exploring the Foreign Policies of Populist Governments: (Latin) America First,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 24, no. 3 (2021): 655, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-020-00206-8>.

²¹⁴ Catarina Kinnvall and Ted Svensson, “Exploring the Populist ‘Mind’: Anxiety, Fantasy, and Everyday Populism,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 24, no. 3 (2022): 530, <https://doi.org/10.1177/136914812211075925>.

²¹⁵ Georg Löfflmann, “Introduction to Special Issue: The Study of Populism in International Relations,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 24, no. 3 (2022): 403-415, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481221103116>.

²¹⁶ Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin, *Decision-Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1954).

international interactions. This viewpoint prioritizes decision-makers and leaders' subjective perceptions as filters for additional local and global opportunities and limitations. A multitude of elements, including psychological, sociological, ideational, political, institutional, and material ones, influence how decision makers understand and react to their local and foreign settings. Thus, via this psychological experience of agents, a psychological approach provides integration of many international relations theories and their theoretical shifts.

2.1. Role of Emotions, Values, Beliefs, and Identities in Shaping the Populist International System

This chapter explores the psychological underpinnings of how populist leaders interact with and transform the international system. Building on the broader political psychology framework presented earlier, this chapter examines how emotions, values, beliefs, and identities play a key role in populist discourse and foreign policy behavior. These factors not only fuel populist discourse but also justify confrontational attitudes and exclusionary rhetoric toward foreign organizations or alleged external threats. By explaining how these emotional and identity-related dynamics operate, this chapter provides a theoretical framework for examining populist leadership tactics in Hungary and Türkiye.

The role of emotions is apparent and widespread in global politics, with its implications particularly noticeable in the realm of transnational communications.²¹⁷ Fear and hatred are not the sole emotions with significant roles in global politics; empathy and compassion, for example, can wield equal influence.²¹⁸ Yet, in populist politics, mainly the former are used in leaders' discourses. Despite being integral to various facets of global politics, the significance of emotions has been overlooked in the field of international relations scholarship. For instance, fear holds a crucial position in realist theories of security dilemmas, yet few authors explicitly acknowledge or systematically examine this emotion.²¹⁹ An exception lies in the longstanding tradition of studying thoroughly the psychological aspects of foreign policy. However, even in

²¹⁷Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, "Theorizing Emotions in World Politics," *International Theory* 6, no. 3 (2014): 491–514.

²¹⁸Andrew A. G. Ross, *Mixed Emotions: Beyond Fear and Hatred in International Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

²¹⁹Maria Laura Lanzillo, "Governing Fear: From the Modern Dominance of Passions to Security Policies and Risk Management in the Global Era," *Governare la paura: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* (2009).

this context, emotions have not been fully recognized, primarily viewed as departures from rationality and factors that might account for misperceptions.²²⁰

The significance of emotions in the field of international relations research is growing steadily.²²¹ Over the last ten years, the study of emotions in global politics has experienced a significant shift originally initiated as a critique of the longstanding division between emotion and reason, an increasing number of scholars in international relations now view emotions as inherent to the social sphere and, consequently, integral to world politics.²²² This shift has encouraged researchers to study emotions to gain new insights into both traditional and unexpected political events. The term “emotional turn” is now often used to describe this shift in focus. Emotions play an important role at multiple levels of analysis, prompting researchers to study them from a variety of perspectives, from how the brain responds to stimuli to how collective fear develops over time.²²³

While early political psychology studies opened new understandings of emotion, they also had limitations. Many of these works, especially those focused on psychology and deterrence, were still informed by the rational actor model. Emotions were often viewed as impediments to rational thought, leading to misperceptions that could interfere with sound political judgment.²²⁴ This approach kept emotion and cognition separate concepts; a distinction that still dominates much of today’s international relations research.

Fear is perhaps the most crucial emotion for interpreting international politics. It has most frequently been interpreted as a central emotion behind the traditional security dilemma, a feature of international politics widely regarded as characteristic of international relations.²²⁵ Surprisingly, this affective interpretation differs from structural realist perspectives, contending that security dilemmas are caused by the structure of the international system rather than

²²⁰ Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison, *Understanding Emotions in World Politics: Reflections on Method* (Canberra: Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2007).

²²¹ Hutchison and Bleiker, “Theorizing Emotions in World Politics”.

²²² Brent E. Sasley, “Theorizing States’ Emotions,” *International Studies Review* 13, no. 3 (2011): 452-476. ; Yohan Ariffin, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Vesselin Popovski, eds., *Emotions in International Politics: Beyond Mainstream International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²²³ Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, “Social Functions of Emotions at Four Levels of Analysis,” *Cognition & Emotion* 13, no. 5 (1999): 505-21.; Joanna Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History,” *History Workshop Journal* 55, no. 1 (2003).; Leonie Huddy, “Fear and How It Works: Science and the Social Sciences,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2004): 801-805.

²²⁴ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 167-214.

²²⁵ Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, “Rethinking the Security Dilemma,” in *Security Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Paul D. Williams (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 131-150.

needing to be motivated by emotions or behaviors.²²⁶ Still, fear has long dominated the analysis of international politics. In addition to traditional security issues, fear also plays a central role in foreign policy populism. As a central part of political psychology, fear serves to mobilize popular support and thrust voters toward populists by increasing a sense of insecurity and sense of urgency.²²⁷ Anger, on the other hand, along with related feelings like shame and hatred maybe as a result of fear, is sometimes seen as the primary factor that contributes to the disastrous choice, for instance, to start a war or conduct a military intervention.²²⁸ Although constructivism and poststructuralism have different ontologies, both provide important conceptual connections to political psychology by emphasizing the social construction of identity, emotion, and meaning through discourse. International relations theories have some subtleties in the study of political psychology. To study the unique effects of discrete emotions like anger and anxiety, both are increasingly moving beyond general levels of emotional arousal or positive and negative valence.²²⁹ They are also starting to connect with the issue of how emotions are frequently manipulated by strategic elites.²³⁰

Populism undeniably originates from feelings of anger and discontent, and it is essential not to overlook the identified potential sources of anger as catalysts for populist sentiments and movements.²³¹ Research has demonstrated how emotions such as fear, anger, danger, and collective resentment may mobilize voters to support a populist movement.²³² At the same time, populist discourse serves a positive purpose by offering communities a positive alternative to

²²⁶ Neta C. Crawford, "The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships," *International Security* 24, no. 4 (2000): 131-50.

²²⁷ Guillem Rico, Marc Guinjoan, and Eva Anduiza, "The Emotional Underpinnings of Populism: How Anger and Fear Affect Populist Attitudes," *Swiss Political Science Review* 23, no. 4 (2017): 444-461.; Pavlos Vasilopoulos, George Marcus, Martial Foucault, and Nicolas Valdini, "Fear, Anger, and Voting for the Far Right: Evidence from the November 13, 2015 Paris Terror Attacks," *Political Psychology* 40, no. 4 (2019): 679-704.

²²⁸ Violet Cheung-Blunden and Bill Blunden, "The Emotional Construal of War: Anger, Fear, and Other Negative Emotions," *Peace and Conflict* 14, no. 2 (2008): 123-150.

²²⁹ Bleiker and Hutchison, *Understanding Emotions in World Politics*.; Eran Halperin, Alexandra G. Russell, Carol S. Dweck, and James J. Gross, "Anger, Hatred, and the Quest for Peace: Anger Can Be Constructive in the Absence of Hatred," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 2 (2011): 274-291.; Joshua D. Kertzer and Kathleen M. McGraw, "Folk Realism: Testing the Microfoundations of Realism in Ordinary Citizens," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2012): 245-258.; Thomas Zeitzoff, "Anger, Exposure to Violence, and Intragroup Conflict: A 'Lab in the Field' Experiment in Southern Israel," *Political Psychology* 35, no. 3 (2014): 309-335.; Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²³⁰ Omar Shahabudin McDoom, "The Psychology of Threat in Intergroup Conflict: Emotions, Rationality, and Opportunity in the Rwandan Genocide," *International Security* 37, no. 2 (2012): 119-55.

²³¹ George E. Marcus, "The Rise of Populism: The Politics of Justice, Anger, and Grievance," in *The Psychology of Populism*, ed. Joseph P. Forgas, William D. Crano, and Klaus Fiedler (New York: Routledge, 2021).

²³² Joseph P. Forgas and William D. Crano, "The Psychology of Populism: The Tribal Challenge to Liberal Democracy," in *The Psychology of Populism*, ed. Joseph P. Forgas, William D. Crano, and Klaus Fiedler (New York: Routledge, 2021).

the status quo that they perceive as unjust or harmful. By offering cognitive simplicity, a clear moral distinction between good and evil, a strong sense of group identity, and the possibility of collective renewal or salvation, populist ideologies often appeal to psychological needs.²³³ Rather than presenting rational or realistic explanations, leaders such as Putin, Orbán, Erdoğan or Kaczyński, label their opponents as enemies of the people or as evils. The tribal antagonism that populists exploit is deeply connected to fundamental human needs and values, especially the universal desire to identify with meaningful and positive social groups or collectives.²³⁴ There is considerable evidence that those who have a well-articulated feeling of relative hardship, grievance, and anger favor populist politics more.²³⁵ Thus, unpleasant economic, social, and cultural conditions stimulate the potential for populism, but populism does not always emerge in reaction to such societal stresses.

Earlier study has concentrated on the structural factors that underline the perception of threat and injustice, such as economic anxiety or cultural backlash.²³⁶ Specific national and personal circumstances play a role in determining who perceives this threat²³⁷ also influence the discursive opportunities available²³⁸, thereby shaping the substantive focus of populist messages in different contexts.²³⁹ Within these contexts, it has been demonstrated that individuals with stronger populist attitudes are more drawn to populist parties and the leaders²⁴⁰,

²³³ Antonio Chirumbolo, Cristina Areni, Guido Baldner, and Arie W. Kruglanski, "Effects of Need for Closure on Creativity in Small Group Interactions," *European Journal of Personality* 18, no. 4 (2004).; Arie W. Kruglanski, Erica Molinario, and Gilda Sensales, "On the Allure of Certainty and Dignity," in *The Psychology of Populism: The Tribal Challenge to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Joseph P. Forgas, William D. Crano, and Klaus Fiedler (New York: Routledge, 2021).; Jan-Willem van Prooijen, "Overconfidence in Radical Politics," in *The Psychology of Populism: The Tribal Challenge to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Joseph P. Forgas, William D. Crano, and Klaus Fiedler (New York: Routledge, 2021).

²³⁴ Henri Tajfel and Joseph P. Forgas, "Social Categorization: Cognitions, Values and Groups," in *Feeling and Thinking: The Role of Affect in Social Cognition*, ed. Joseph P. Forgas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).; Michael A. Hogg and Oluf Gøtzsche-Astrup, "Self-Uncertainty and Populism: Why We Endorse Populist Ideologies, Identify with Populist Groups, and Support Populist Leaders," in *The Psychology of Populism: The Tribal Challenge to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Joseph P. Forgas, William D. Crano, and Klaus Fiedler (New York: Routledge, 2021).

²³⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "Against Identity Politics: The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 5 (2018).

²³⁶ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*.

²³⁷ Matthijs Rooduijn, "What Unites the Voter Bases of Populist Parties? Comparing the Electorates of 15 Populist Parties," *European Political Science Review* 10, no. 3 (2018).

²³⁸ Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck, and Claes H. de Vreese, eds., *Populist Political Communication in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

²³⁹ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*.; Stijn van Kessel, *Populist Parties in Europe: Agents of Discontent?* (London: Springer, 2015).

²⁴⁰ Agnes Akkerman, Cas Mudde, and Andrej Zaslove, "How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters," *Comparative Political Studies* 47, no. 9 (2014).; Kirk A. Hawkins and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Introduction: The Ideational Approach," in *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Concept, Theory, and Analysis*, ed. Kirk A. Hawkins, Ryan E. Carlin, Levente Littvay, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (New

even when their policy preferences do not entirely align with those of a populist party.²⁴¹ Significantly, voters who feel more vulnerable are more likely to support populism.²⁴² In fact, as argued by Spruyt et al.²⁴³, this is the juncture where psychological coping mechanisms among voters and the politicization of social conditions by parties come together.

The foundational explanation relies on Kurt Lewin's seminal theory, which posits that human behavior is shaped by the perceived environment, encompassing both physical and social factors, along with individual tendencies such as ideas, thoughts, intentions, and fantasies.²⁴⁴ According to Lewin, the critical aspect in social life is not the objective reality but how it is perceived and interpreted by individuals. Notably, Lewin extended this theory to group dynamics, asserting that the behavior of both individuals and groups is significantly influenced by their collective perception of the situation and group characteristics.²⁴⁵ Another key element of Lewin's theory is the proposal that a tension state arises within the human system when there is a psychological need or intention, and this tension is reduced when the need or intention is fulfilled.²⁴⁶

A common populist narrative often involves stirring up public sentiment by asserting that the elites have betrayed the people.²⁴⁷ In any governmental system, including a monarchy, there is an expectation that the leadership should dutifully guide its "crowd", ensuring protection and meeting its needs, hence creating a sense of identity. The government views failure to fulfill this sacred mission as a breach of trust and grounds for its removal and replacement, whether through peaceful means or otherwise.²⁴⁸ The universal structure of populist narratives, evident in various versions across cultures and historical periods, can be characterized by two key

York: Routledge, 2018).; J. Eric Oliver and Wendy M. Rahn, "Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667, no. 1 (2016).

²⁴¹ Steven M. van Hauwaert and Stijn van Kessel, "Beyond Protest and Discontent: A Cross-National Analysis of the Effect of Populist Attitudes and Issue Positions on Populist Party Support," *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 1 (2018).

²⁴² Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza, "The Emotional Underpinnings of Populism"; Bram Spruyt, Gil Keppens, and Filip Van Droogenbroeck, "Who Supports Populism and What Attracts People to It?," *Political Research Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2016).

²⁴³ Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck, "Who Supports Populism and What Attracts People to It?," 344.

²⁴⁴ Barbara Kump, "Lewin's Field Theory as a Lens for Understanding Incumbent Actors' Agency in Sustainability Transitions," *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 46 (2023): 100683, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2022.100683>.

²⁴⁵ Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers*, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948).

²⁴⁶ Kump, "Lewin's Field Theory as a Lens for Understanding Incumbent Actors' Agency," 100683.

²⁴⁷ Matthijs Rooduijn, "The Rise of the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe," *European View* 14, no. 1 (2015).

²⁴⁸ Théo Fournier, "From Rhetoric to Action: A Constitutional Analysis of Populism," *German Law Journal* 20, no. 3 (2019).

features²⁴⁹: (1) they are straightforward and comprehensible, contributing to a sense of certainty, and (2) they provide a sense of empowerment, promising a path to significance and dignity. These narratives commonly adopt a Manichean nature, depicting virtuous common people oppressed by a malevolent elite and advocating for political actions aimed at toppling the elite and assuming control of societal affairs.

According to the populist perspective, the masses have experienced oppression at the hands of the elite and the institutions established by them. Populist discourse frequently incorporates a moral dimension.²⁵⁰ Müller suggests that populists merge anti-elitism with the belief that they possess a morally superior understanding of what constitutes a genuine citizen of their nation.²⁵¹ The conceptualization of the moral aspect might vary across left- and right-wing political orientations. In the case of progressive populists, the moral dimension could revolve around achieving justice and equality for all individuals²⁵², while for far-right populism, the moral component may focus on the economic and social upliftment of the ingroup. Right-wing populism often taps into a sense of relative deprivation, whether it be in comparison to other societal groups²⁵³ or in relation to one's own expectations or aspirations, namely, the anticipated wealth or status individuals believed they should have achieved by a particular point in their lives.²⁵⁴ In the context of far-right populism, there is a perceived significant threat that deprives the masses of what they rightfully deserve.

The mechanisms described above—appeals to fear, constructions of identity boundaries, and value-driven narratives—are not merely theoretical psychological traits; rather, they are calculated tools used by populist actors to influence public opinion and advocate for political decisions globally. These rhetorical strategies, as the following sections will demonstrate, are crucial to the discourses of Viktor Orbán and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, illuminating how populist foreign policy narratives are intertwined with emotion and identity. These insights will be operationalized in the following discussion through a comprehensive discourse analysis of each

²⁴⁹ Kostiantyn Yanchenko, "Conceptualizing a Populist Narrative: Rationales, Attributes, Implications," *Populism* 4, no. 2 (2021).

²⁵⁰ Lawrence R. Alschuler and Tamara Metze, "Populism and the Psychopolitics of Morality," *Politics, Culture and Socialization* 8, nos. 1–2 (2020).

²⁵¹ Müller, *What Is Populism?*.

²⁵² Santiago Zabala, "The Difference between Right- and Left-Wing Populism," *Al Jazeera*, January 17, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/1/17/the-difference-between-right-and-left-wing-populism>

²⁵³ Marta Marchlewska et al., "Populism as Identity Politics: Perceived In-Group Disadvantage, Collective Narcissism, and Support for Populism," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 9, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617732393>.

²⁵⁴ Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Social Psychological Perspectives on Trump Supporters," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 5, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v5i1.750>.

leader's speeches and campaign messages. In this dissertation, it is shown that Erdoğan and Orbán use their discourses placing populism as an ideology to trigger their countries' citizens' feelings of identity, fear, and anger. The people whose fundamental beliefs have been threatened by the so-called external powers, or the archenemies, are inclined to vote for the populist leaders who present themselves as the nation's saviors. As the populist leaders provide a sense of comfort to their citizens, they also covertly threaten the pure people with their sense of nationalism unless they vote for them. In this study, CDA of case leaders' speeches help reveal the political-psychological aspects of populist international relations.

2.2. Role of Leaders in Shaping International System

Foreign policy, particularly diplomacy, is an arena dominated by an exceptionally exclusive and elite community, consisting of unelected foreign policy bureaucrats, politicians (often secondary tier), and scholars from think tanks.²⁵⁵ From the populist perspective, the global outlook championed by such elites symbolizes the disconnect between the people and their government.²⁵⁶ Numerous foreign policy issues are not only beyond the scope of ordinary citizens' concerns²⁵⁷, but the complicated diplomatic protocols and etiquette further contribute to the perception of foreign affairs being detached from the "true people".²⁵⁸ Therefore, it can be predicted that populist leaders will try to reduce the influence of foreign policy actors, especially career diplomats, whom they associate with elitism and globalization. According to research, excessive centralization of authority is a typical feature of populist regimes.²⁵⁹ This is clearly evident in the case of Türkiye. This concentration of power often weakens established institutions, such as foreign ministries, as foreign policy choices are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the populist leader and a small group of trusted advisors.²⁶⁰ One notable trend in recent global politics has been the rise of populist leaders to power across various regions.²⁶¹ As populists assume control of the executive and legislative branches, the implications of their

²⁵⁵ Valentin Naumescu, Raluca Moldovan, and Diana Petruț, "The EU and NATO Approaches," 2022.

²⁵⁶ Nadesan and Ron, "Between 'the People' and Elites".

²⁵⁷ Noé Cornago, "Perforated Sovereignties, Agonistic Pluralism and the Durability of (Para)Diplomacy," in *Sustainable Diplomacies*, ed. Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²⁵⁸ Jozef Bátora, "Diplomacy and People," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁵⁹ Esra Cuhadar, Juliet Kaarbo, Baris Kesgin, and Binnur Ozkececi-Taner, "Personality or Role? Comparisons of Turkish Leaders across Different Institutional Positions," *Personality and Individual Differences* 106 (2017).; Sandra Destradi and Johannes Plagemann, "Populism and International Relations: (Un)Predictability, Personalisation, and the Reinforcement of Existing Trends in World Politics," *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 5 (2019): 711-730.

²⁶⁰ Destradi and Plagemann, "Populism and International Relations".

²⁶¹ Ibid.

rise become increasingly significant in international politics. While populist parties may influence foreign policy as junior partners in coalition governments or by shaping political discourse in opposition, the election of populist leaders and the establishment of populist governments will have a more direct impact on the foreign policies of states, consequently influencing global politics.²⁶²

International relations researchers have shown a growing interest in the study of leaders since studies have started to show that individual leaders matter in international politics.²⁶³ A previous tradition in international relations psychology examined leaders ideographically, focusing mostly on operational codes, cognitive maps, and psychological profiles of specific leaders.²⁶⁴ While some work in this tradition is still being done²⁶⁵, most recent research on leaders in international relations is less explicitly psychological and more nomothetic, concentrating on the general importance of leaders in international relations²⁶⁶ rather than cognitive attributes. There are times when the two waves of work debate one another due to their different methods. In contrast to the former tradition, the latter frequently examines leaders situationally. This is because leaders may encounter distinct incentive structures because of varying institutional environments²⁶⁷, or they may have unique political or military experiences that influence their conduct.²⁶⁸ Further interaction between the two literary subjects would be useful in examining the relationship between temperamental traits and situational interests.²⁶⁹

²⁶² Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove, "The Impact of Populist Radical Right Parties on Foreign Policy: The Northern League as a Junior Coalition Partner in the Berlusconi Governments," *European Political Science Review* 7, no. 4 (2015).

²⁶³ Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001).; Robert Jervis, "Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?" *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013).; Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

²⁶⁴ Kertzer and Tingley, "Political Psychology in International Relations".

²⁶⁵ Margaret G. Hermann et al., "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals," *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2001).; Mark Schafer and Stephen G. Walker, "Democratic Leaders and the Democratic Peace: The Operational Codes of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2006); Stephen Benedict Dyson, "Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2, no. 3 (2006).; Renshon, "Stability and Change in Belief Systems".

²⁶⁶ Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).; Jessica L. P. Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).; Michael C. Horowitz, Allan C. Stam, and Cali M. Ellis, *Why Leaders Fight* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁶⁷ Fiona McGillivray and Alastair Smith, *Punishing the Prince: A Theory of Interstate Relations, Political Institutions, and Leader Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

²⁶⁸ Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis, *Why Leaders Fight*.; Matthew Fuhrmann and Michael C. Horowitz, "When Leaders Matter: Rebel Experience and Nuclear Proliferation," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 1 (2015).

²⁶⁹ Joshua D. Kertzer, *Resolve in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

As a contribution to the analysis of leaders' role in international relations literature, Cuhadar et al.²⁷⁰ examine how Turkish leaders' personality profiles alter as they take on various institutional roles with various sets of limitations using machine-coded content analysis. Accordingly, despite contextual shifts, leaders' attributes remain mostly constant. In a similar vein, it is remarkable how little the psychology of international relations has done to reconcile the study of elite political conduct with that of popular political behavior. While studies of personality in mass political behavior are built around commonly used frameworks from personality psychology, such as the Big 5^{271 272}, political psychologists studying elite behavior tend to use other frameworks e.g., leadership style²⁷³, perhaps stemming from the assumption that the key explanatory frameworks for foreign policy decision-making should be specific to foreign policy itself.²⁷⁴

The foreign policy direction of leaders' nations, on the other hand, is not entirely altered by populists in power. Conversely, populists tend to support established patterns in international affairs, often more drastically or severely than their non-populist predecessors.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, a characteristic aspect of populists in positions of power is their ongoing mobilization of their support base. Once in government, as they themselves become the often-criticized elite, populists must find new ways to maintain an anti-elitist stance.²⁷⁶ This might involve presenting themselves as victims (of the media, judiciary, or other domestic institutions) or attributing any failures to elites working behind the scenes, whether domestically or internationally. Additionally, the assertion of being the authentic representatives of the people requires continual performative validation. Populists are consistently on the campaign trail, continuously engaging in polarization. Consequently, under populist administrations, the politicization of specific international issues for domestic mobilization (such as rallying around the flag) can be expected to be especially intense.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁰ Cuhadar et al., "Personality or Role?"

²⁷¹ The five broad personality traits described by the theory are extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (D. W. Fiske, 1949; later developed by Norman (1967), Smith (1967), Goldberg (1981), and McCrae & Costa (1987)).

²⁷² Alan S. Gerber et al., "Personality and Political Attitudes: Relationships across Issue Domains and Political Contexts," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010).

²⁷³ Jonathan W. Keller and Yi Edward Yang, "Leadership Style, Decision Context, and the Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making: An Experimental Analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 5 (2008).

²⁷⁴ Maryann E. Gallagher and Susan H. Allen, "Presidential Personality: Not Just a Nuisance," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10, no. 1 (2014).

²⁷⁵ Destradi and Plagemann, "Populism and International Relations," 728.

²⁷⁶ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 41.

²⁷⁷ Destradi, Plagemann, and Taş, "Populism and the Politicisation of Foreign Policy".

Populists might not universally embrace a more aggressive foreign policy. Instead, their utilization of foreign policy for domestic mobilization is likely to embody a blend of their populist “thin ideology” (marked by anti-elitism and anti-pluralism) with their underlying “thick ideology”^{278, 279} Depending on this thick ideology, populists may exclude specific segments of the population from their definition of the true people, such as migrants or members of certain minorities. In such instances, it can be anticipated that populists in power will direct their attention to foreign countries closely associated with the excluded sections of their population, primarily for domestic mobilization purposes. The particular thick ideology of populists can either amplify or alleviate their skepticism toward global governance in certain policies. For instance, right-wing populists may be more willing to compromise on trade liberalization than those advocating a leftist thick ideology.²⁸⁰ Populists might also be more inclined to support the people abroad against entities hostile to them, potentially interfering with the internal affairs of countries hosting diasporas. For instance, Orbán’s policy towards the Hungarian citizens abroad²⁸¹ and Erdoğan’s interest in Turkish citizens especially in Germany²⁸² supports their populist politics and take place in discourses during election times.

An emerging theme in the literature on the international aspects of populism highlights how populism arises as a response to global developments, including the growing authority and politicization of international organizations. The domestic anti-elitism inherent in populism is likely to align with a disregard for transnational elites and international institutions perceived as detached from the real people.²⁸³ Populist leaders are expected to view international institutions as constraints on their government’s maneuvering or as threats to their country’s cherished national sovereignty; Hungary and Türkiye’s fundamental skepticism to the EU and International Monetary Fund (IMF)²⁸⁴ can summarize this viewpoint. Consequently, when

²⁷⁸ Attributes the success of populist parties to particular “thick” or “host” ideologies, such as anti-immigration, anti-globalization, or pro-redistribution positions. (Neuner, F. G., & Wratil, C. (2022). The populist marketplace: Unpacking the role of “thin” and “thick” ideology. *Political Behavior*, 44(2), 551-574.)

²⁷⁹ Destradi and Plagemann, “Populism and International Relations,” 729.

²⁸⁰ Kent Jones, *Populism and Trade: The Challenge to the Global Trading System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

²⁸¹ Pieter Stockmans, “How Viktor Orbán Is Annexing the Hungarian Minority in Romania,” *MO Magazine*, January 7, 2023, <https://www.mo.be/reportage/71769>.

²⁸² Seçkin Söylemez, “Yeni Türk Diaspora Politikası ve Almanya’daki Türkiye Kökenli ‘Diaspora’nın Yeniden Keşfi,” *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*, September 10, 2021, <https://tr.boell.org/tr/2021/09/10/yeni-turk-diaspora-politikasi-ve-almanyadaki-turkiye-kokenli-diasporanin-yeniden-kesfi>.

²⁸³ Metawe, “Populism and Domestic/International Politics”.

²⁸⁴ *Euractiv*, “Budapest to Symbolically Shut Down IMF Office,” July 16, 2013, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-europe/news/budapest-to-symbolically-shut-down-imf-office/>

populists come to power, it is expected that they might sideline such institutions, as they do with intermediate institutions domestically.²⁸⁵

The anti-pluralist aspect of populism asserts that only the populist leader, and no one else, can represent the true people.²⁸⁶ Hence, when populists assume government positions, bureaucracy may remain intact. The pathway to the populist leader's decision-making likely involves less standardized communication channels and more reliance on personal or familial connections, or party affiliations. Populist leaders are expected to collaborate with small groups of advisors, likely not drawn from traditional foreign policy elites.²⁸⁷ Simultaneously, these leaders may place greater trust in their personal relationships with other world leaders rather than relying on more formalized methods of bilateral communication, such as ambassadors or contacts with line ministries.²⁸⁸

Instead of engaging in political competition with recognized opposition, populist leaders assert that they are battling shadowy adversaries, both domestically and internationally.²⁸⁹ This approach is, in part, a response to the dilemma that holding office and becoming the new governing elite could compromise their fundamental anti-establishment narrative. To navigate this contradiction, populists in power frequently criticize individuals from the previous elite, such as Erdoğan's criticism towards the Kemalist²⁹⁰ elites before him and his party coming to power in 2002 and onwards, claiming they are still exerting influence behind the scenes. This accusation is then used as a justification for purging the civil service. Populist leaders resonate with a portion of the population disenchanted by mainstream politics and policies. Political sociologists and scholars have previously observed that populist leaders employ discursive tactics that are atypical within the public sphere.²⁹¹ These observers highlight that populists make use of simplistic moral arguments pitting good against evil, heavily rely on emotional appeals (both negative and positive), cautious rationality, and frequently employ vague and sentimental language in their rhetoric and commitments. They may publicly display emotions,

²⁸⁵ Metawe, "Populism and Domestic/International Politics".

²⁸⁶ Destradi and Plagemann, "Populism and International Relations".

²⁸⁷ Hisarhoğlu et al., "Contesting the 'Corrupt Elites,' Creating the 'Pure People'".

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 5.

²⁸⁹ Andrea L. P. Pirro and Paul Taggart, "Populists in Power and Conspiracy Theories," *Party Politics* 29, no. 3 (2023).

²⁹⁰ The entirety of the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first President of the Republic of Türkiye, regarding the political, social and economic shaping of the new state established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire is called "Kemalism". (Alpbaz, M. M. (2019). Kemalist otoriterlik, anayasa yargısı ve askeri mahkemeler. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 74(3), 895-929.)

²⁹¹ Francesco Duina, "Why Populist Leaders Succeed," *Contexts* 21, no. 3 (2022).

violate diplomatic norms, and take unexpected actions without consulting even their most trusted advisors and allies.²⁹² It is indeed accurate to assert that these behaviors diverge from the conventional practices associated with the public sphere. All of these behaviors have a common underlying factor: they are characteristic of how it is typically operated in the private sphere. Hence, when exhibited by political leaders in a public and visible manner, they directly challenge the fundamental principles of the public sphere. Although populists may use a variety of approaches²⁹³, “speaking like the people” is a common goal of populist discourse.²⁹⁴

The rhetoric of populist politicians is complemented by their mannerisms. It follows the same reasoning. Ordinary politicians behave in public in a calm, premeditated manner that is unaffected by their characteristics or personal preferences.²⁹⁵ Their remarks are carefully chosen and preferably reflective of a pre-established procedure and formula, regardless of whether they are speaking to an ordinary person or the prime minister of another nation. The public is often reached by leaders through established, closely watched channels of communication. An explanation for populist leaders’ success must explain not just why millions of their supporters endorse them but also why they frequently do so intensely and viscerally. Populist leaders inspire strong, innate, and frequently unwavering loyalty. Those leaders inspire, acknowledge, and even personify their people.²⁹⁶ In sum, populist leaders can mobilize and persuade their supporters with their bold, passionate, and energetic political style because they can build a direct and effective relationship with them.²⁹⁷ Politicians may overcome gaps between their messages and reality with the use of charisma, which is especially helpful in demagogic communication.²⁹⁸

2.3. The Implications of Political Psychology for the Study of Populism

Political psychology ensures understanding the mechanisms underlying populism, particularly how populist leaders play on emotions, cognitive biases, and social identity dynamics.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Duncan McDonnell and Stefano Ondelli, “The Language of Right-Wing Populist Leaders: Not So Simple,” *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 3 (2022).

²⁹⁴ Daniel Bischof and Roman Senninger, “Simple Politics for the People? Complexity in Campaign Messages and Political Knowledge,” *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 2 (2018).; Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey, “Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style,” *Political Studies* 62, no. 2 (2014).

²⁹⁵ Duina, “Why Populist Leaders Succeed”.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” *Political Studies* 47, no. 1 (1999).; Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept”.

²⁹⁸ Robert R. Barr, “Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics,” *Party Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 32.

Populism's slogan "us-them" narratives that create a dichotomy between "pure people" and "corrupt elites" and this dichotomy is often consolidated by crisis framing and fear-based propaganda, as will be explained thoroughly in the case study chapter in this dissertation. Cognitive biases like availability and confirmation help perpetuate populist views as people selectively analyze information that supports their worldview. When leaders frame political and social issues in ways that provoke existential anxiety, emotions like fear, anger, and nostalgia are key to mobilizing popular support.²⁹⁹ Populist leaders' discourses often arouse a sense of ontological insecurity in their followers while also creating a sense of security and belonging.³⁰⁰ Moreover, political psychology explains populist leaders' high levels of control and narcissism, which are the two personality traits that enable them to appeal to and retain loyal followers. By combining psychological perspectives, a deeper understanding can be gained of why populism is so strong in different political contexts and countries and how it affects both domestic and foreign relations.

Populism has influenced foreign policy, government strategies, and electoral dynamics in a variety of political contexts. Although much of the research on the topic has focused on its institutional effects³⁰¹, structural foundations, and ideological side³⁰², a psychological approach is needed to understand the appeal, purpose, and consequences of populism. Political psychology, a specialized field that studies how identity, emotions, personality traits, and cognitive processes influence political behavior, can and should be used to study populism.

The notion that political systems are fundamentally shaped by human nature and reflect human psychology can be traced back to antiquity, as Plato originally proposed in his seminal work, the Republic.³⁰³ This foundational idea was reiterated by John Stuart Mill through his renowned assertion that "all phenomena of society are also phenomena of human nature".³⁰⁴ In political science, populism was traditionally viewed as a supply-side phenomenon that centered on political leaders. While this presents some opportunities for political psychology, the field is no

²⁹⁹ Selim Erdem Aytaç, Ali Çarkoğlu, and Ezgi Elçi, "Populist Appeals, Emotions, and Political Mobilization," *American Behavioral Scientist* 69, no. 5 (2025).

³⁰⁰ Monika Gabriela Bartoszewicz, "Identity and Security: The Affective Ontology of Populism," in *Political Identification in Europe: Community in Crisis?* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021).

³⁰¹ Kenneth M. Roberts, "Populism and Polarization in Comparative Perspective: Constitutive, Spatial and Institutional Dimensions," *Government and Opposition* 57, no. 4 (2022).

³⁰² Aslanidis, "Is Populism an Ideology?"

³⁰³ Thomas Fleming, *The Politics of Human Nature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1988).

³⁰⁴ Daniel Little, "John Stuart Mill as a Social Science Founder," *Understanding Society (blog)*, August 31, 2009, <https://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/2009/08/john-stuart-mill-as-social-science.html>.; John Stuart Mill, *The Logic of the Moral Sciences* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1988).

stranger for analyzing political leaders. Political psychology has the most promise when it comes to the ideational method, which naturally extends to supply-side (politician) and demand-side (public) examinations of the phenomena.³⁰⁵ Recent studies³⁰⁶ have focused more on the demand side of populism, and political psychology is gradually beginning to examine the populist phenomena. Although populism is a difficult term to quantify, the area that has made significant contributions to the knowledge of authoritarianism, nationalism, nativism, and radical-right.

By political psychology standards, populism is a complicated and contentious term. Most empirical researchers are beginning to agree on the ideational definition, however there are still disagreements about what it truly is.³⁰⁷ According to the ideational definition, populism is an ideology or discourse frame that stems from the conflict between the pure, homogenous people and the cunning elites who plot to exploit them.³⁰⁸ Following this ideational definition populism offers unprecedented opportunities to assess the phenomenon attitudinally and to understand the psychological precedence and individual differences underlying it.³⁰⁹ Populism adopts a normative position that views politics as the exclusive manifestation of the will of the people. Although not exhaustive, populism is often viewed as a political tactic focused on rationalist vote-maximizing strategies³¹⁰ or as a style focused on the “tell-it-like-it-is” presentation of political discourse.³¹¹

Particular attention has been paid to the function of personality traits in empirical research, which has found a connection between voting for populist parties and poor agreeableness.³¹² Instead, a different line of empirical research has focused on the significance of uncertainty avoidance in voting for radical-right populist parties.³¹³ A few studies have also examined the

³⁰⁵ Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Bringing Political Psychology into the Study of Populism,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 376, no. 1822 (2021): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2020.0148>.

³⁰⁶ Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Introduction: The Ideational Approach”; Rooduijn, “What Unites the Voter Bases of Populist Parties?”.

³⁰⁷ Cengiz Erisen et al., “Psychological Correlates of Populist Attitudes,” *Advances in Political Psychology* 42, Suppl. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12768>.

³⁰⁸ Mudde, “An Ideational Approach”.

³⁰⁹ Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Introduction: The Ideational Approach”.

³¹⁰ Kurt Weyland, “A Political-Strategic Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³¹¹ Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*.

³¹² Bert N. Bakker, Matthijs Rooduijn, and Gijs Schumacher, “The Psychological Roots of Populist Voting: Evidence from the United States, the Netherlands and Germany,” *European Journal of Political Research* 55, no. 2 (2016).

³¹³ Barbara Keys and Claire Yorke, “Personal and Political Emotions in the Mind of the Diplomat,” *Political Psychology* 40, no. 6 (2019).

relationship between the populist political perspective and emotions, particularly rage.³¹⁴ Furthermore, researchers in the field of populism have utilized insights from psychology to create metrics for assessing populist attitudes and their foundational elements.³¹⁵ They have also formulated operational definitions, contending that the concept of populism is more impactful when considered as a cohesive entity rather than merely the sum of its individual components.³¹⁶ Integrating political psychology into populism studies is essential for developing more nuanced analyses of populist movements and their implications for democracy. This interdisciplinary approach not only enriches academic debates but also offers practical insights for policymakers and civil society actors seeking to counter the divisive effects of populist politics. In this context, an analysis of the discursive techniques used by populist leaders in their election campaigns shows that political psychology can offer important insights into voter mobilization attempts. Through focusing on the interaction of populist narratives, personality traits, and emotional appeals, this dissertation aims to contribute to a better understanding of how leaders such as Erdoğan and Orbán shape domestic and foreign political discourses to consolidate their power.

2.4. General Assumptions and Research Questions

The goal of this study is to examine the political psychology of populist international relations and how countries' leaders can direct their voters in favor of maintaining their hold on power. To achieve this, it is first necessary to position populism within the framework of international relations theories. As stated earlier, contemporary right-wing populism aligns with certain aspects of the three theoretical approaches discussed. Another key argument of this study is that states and their leaders shape international relations through the populist rhetoric they employ. Consequently, a populist state not only influences international relations but also does so through its own foreign policy-making process. At first glance, populism appears to be a concept primarily confined to domestic politics. However, this dissertation argues that populism should be situated within international relations theories. Finally, just as populism shapes domestic politics, it also influences foreign policy. Therefore, analyzing the rhetoric of the selected countries' leaders during specific election periods in the context of foreign policy-

³¹⁴ Marcus, "The Rise of Populism"; Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza, "The Emotional Underpinnings of Populism".

³¹⁵ Erisen et al., "Psychological Correlates of Populist Attitudes".

³¹⁶ Alexander Wuttke, Christian Schimpf, and Harald Schoen, "When the Whole Is Greater than the Sum of Its Parts: On the Conceptualization and Measurement of Populist Attitudes and Other Multidimensional Constructs," *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2 (2020).

making processes will provide valuable insights into the political psychology of international relations.

This dissertation aims to make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature by examining populist foreign policy through the lens of political psychology. It looks at how emotions, especially fear and perceived threats, are incorporated into populist discourse and used strategically to influence both domestic voters and international relations. Using CDA, the study focuses on election speeches to examine how populist leaders frame and employ these emotions.

Based on these ideas, the study examines selected political discourses comparatively and presents a set of research questions to guide the analysis. The main research question of the dissertation is: How does political psychology contribute to the understanding of populist international relations? In order to answer this, the following related questions are explored:

- How are “us versus them” narratives built? Why are these important?
- How do leaders utilize populist discursive dichotomy to shape public opinion and international relations?
- Why is populist discourse necessary for leaders to maintain power in their countries?
- What is the role of populism and political psychology in foreign policy decision-making processes?
- How does a leader’s discourse change in response to electoral concerns, and what impact does this have on foreign policy?

These questions are addressed as comparative case studies using the speeches of Hungarian and Turkish leaders in 2018 and 2022, for Orbán’s speeches, and the general elections of 2018 and 2023, respectively, for Erdoğan’s speeches. This dissertation demonstrates how populist politicians use foreign policy, typically considered an elite decision-making mechanism, to appeal to public opinion and reframe national goals through emotionally charged narratives. Consequently, this study contributes to the emerging field of populist foreign policy by placing populist discourse at the intersection of political psychology and international relations. In addition to improving theoretical knowledge on the global activities of populist leaders, it also aims to provide practical insights into contemporary political dynamics, where domestic and foreign policy areas are increasingly intertwined.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This dissertation follows and uses critical discourse analysis method to reveal the verbal intentions of populist leaders while they are giving speeches and therefore are carrying an aim to appeal to the people. Here, Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orbán and Türkiye's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are the two example populist leaders. In the frame of their discourses during foreign policy executions in times of elections —following the poststructuralist frame as this frame treats the international system not as a fixed structure but as a process that is constantly reconstructed by discourses and power relations— is going to prove that populist leaders use their discourses to pursue getting support from their “loyal” voters. The rhetorical approach, corpus linguistics, and CDA are some of the primary methods used to examine political discourse.³¹⁷ Of these, CDA is the main emphasis of this chapter because it is particularly important in terms of the methodology and analysis techniques used in this study. Afterward the analysis model and the research tools are summarized. First, in order to provide context for this analysis and justify its relevance, it is essential to clarify the concepts of discourse and discourse analysis relevant to this study.

3.1. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis focuses on examining and analyzing how language is used.³¹⁸ The method is used in many scientific arenas from political science³¹⁹ to medical science³²⁰ - in medical science, discourse analysis method is mainly used to examine neurological and psychopathological patterns. Hodges et al.³²¹ differentiated discourse analysis under formal linguistic, empirical, and critical ones. Accordingly, in order to discover the broad underlying principles of the linguistic or communicative function underlying the text, formal linguistic discourse analysis entails a structured examination of the text.³²²

³¹⁷ Douglas Mark Ponton, “Movements and Meanings: Towards an Integrated Approach to Political Discourse Analysis,” *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 20, no. 4 (2016).

³¹⁸ Adam Hodges, “The Politics of Recontextualization: Discursive Competition over Claims of Iranian Involvement in Iraq,” *Discourse & Society* 19, no. 4 (2008).

³¹⁹ José Ignacio Correa Medina and Cecilia Dimaté Rodríguez, “Political Discourse Analysis: Dialogue between Language Sciences and Political Sciences,” *Folios* 33 (2011).; Norman Fairclough, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. James Paul Gee and Michael Handford (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

³²⁰ Julianne Check, “At the Margins? Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Health Research* 14, no. 8 (2004): 1143, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732304266820>.

³²¹ Hodges, “The Politics of Recontextualization”.

³²² *Ibid.*

Discourse analysis may be thought of as a comprehensive study of language in use, given the scope of the idea. It is reasonable to identify certain commonalities in the conception and use of discourse analysis by social scientists, despite the notable disparities across discourse analysis schools and methodologies.³²³ These include defining the research's scope and research questions, assembling the relevant information, which is typically in the form of text, conducting a close reading of the text using various linguistic tools to identify pertinent discursive elements, and interpreting the relationships between the text and its context. The discourse analysis literature shows many classifications. In the majority of cases, it is easy to distinguish between two groups.³²⁴ Discourse is defined in the first as an activity or a process that, according to micro-sociological and linguistic analysts, is primarily used to contextualize spoken language, written texts, speech actions, and turn-taking behaviors in a pragmatic understanding. In the second, the concept of discourse is interpreted within a macro-sociological and socio-historical framework as a collection of verbal and non-verbal social community behaviors, and analytical methods in this way are more interested in discourse-based power relations.³²⁵

Discourse analysis is a qualitative, interpretative, and constructionist tool for examining social phenomena, and it also carries a poststructuralist perspective. It investigates how socially generated concepts and things come into being and are maintained in the world. It also includes a set of presumptions about the beneficial impacts of language in addition to a set of procedures for performing systematic, qualitative analyses of texts.³²⁶ Discourse analysis offers a deeper examination of the precarious condition of meaning, even if it shares a concern with the meaningfulness of social life.

Discourse analysis assumes that discourse cannot be separated from its larger context.³²⁷ Discourses lack an intrinsic meaning of their own, hence, it is up to researchers to identify them historically and socially in order to comprehend their beneficial impacts. All discourse's meanings are formed, sustained, and challenged through the creation, diffusion, and

³²³ Kevin C. Dunn and Iver B. Neumann, "Discourse Analysis," in *Routledge Handbook of International Political Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2016).

³²⁴ Johannes Angermuller, Dominique Maingueneau, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse Studies Reader: An Introduction," in *The Discourse Studies Reader: Main Currents in Theory and Analysis* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2014).

³²⁵ Angermuller, Maingueneau, and Wodak, "The Discourse Studies Reader", 13.

³²⁶ Harriette Marshall and Bianca Raabe, "Political Discourse: Talking about Nationalization and Privatization," in *Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action*, ed. Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (London: Routledge, 1993).

³²⁷ Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

consumption of texts and arise from interactions between the social groups and the complex societal institutions in which discourse is entrenched.³²⁸

Discourse analysis makes the underlying assumption that discourse, which refers to the creation of meaning, its content, and the arrangement of information in a given area, is essential to social and political activity.³²⁹ Discourses define the parameters of what is understandable in voice, thinking, and deed. Understanding discourses, then, entails comprehending the underlying rationale of a certain arena's social and political organization and acknowledging that this arrangement and the power and meaning structures that support it are socially produced rather than naturally occurring.

According to Laffey and Weldes, discourse is not the same as language.³³⁰ They characterize discourse as consisting of both structure and practice. Discourses are social and cultural resources that individuals employ to generate meaning about their surroundings and daily activities.³³¹ These are meaning-in-use structures in practice. The nature of discourses is political. They deal with the creation and distribution of power, conflicts over information, interests, identities, and social relationships they support or obstruct. Discourse is beneficial, it creates the subjects, objects, and relationships between them. They also generate truth by defining the standards by which statements are evaluated.³³² Since it looks at the contexts that make practices, both linguistic and otherwise, discourse analysis is always about power and politics. As a result, it highlights the ideological labor that goes into creating meaning as well as the ideological ramifications of certain meaning-in-use structures.³³³

While texts rather than individual words or phrases are the focus of discourse analysis, Wodak and Meyer defined it as the study of language on bigger units.³³⁴ They substituted new analytical elements, such as texts, discourses, dialogues, speech actions, or communicative experiences, for sentences or words. Discourse analysis was seen as “the expansion of linguistics beyond

³²⁸ Cynthia Hardy, “Researching Organizational Discourse,” *International Studies of Management & Organization* 31, no. 3 (2001): 28.

³²⁹ Lilie Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough, *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Ian Parker, “Discourse: Definitions and Contradictions,” *Philosophical Psychology* 3, nos. 2–3 (1990).

³³⁰ Jutta E. Weldes and Mark Laffey, “Methodological Reflections on Discourse Analysis,” *Qualitative Methods* 2 (2004).

³³¹ Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew, “Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy,” *Political Geography* 11, no. 2 (1992): 193.

³³² Weldes and Laffey, “Methodological Reflections on Discourse Analysis”, 28.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³³⁴ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, “Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory, and Methodology,” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed., ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: SAGE, 2009).

grammar towards a study of activity and interaction” by these scholars.³³⁵ Written and spoken language are both included in discourse analysis. The main goal of discourse analysis, according to Chimombo and Roseberry, is to give a better understanding of texts and how language users comprehend them.³³⁶ Every discourse represents distinct knowledge and approaches the subject from a different perspective because discourses use language in a variety of ways. Discourse analysis seeks to demonstrate how discourses create and reflect understanding by employing language in particular ways.³³⁷

Since political texts will be the main focus of this work, with a particular emphasis on the conceptual component of “us versus them” dichotomy, the social dimensions and elements of the discourse analysis are crucial. As a secondary concern, it is hard to find absolute neutrality in any text because every conversation is full of values, biases, ideas, etc. The quote of “how did that particular statement come about instead of another?” may only reveal this feature to the bare minimum, as Foucault clearly states.³³⁸ In order to expose the explicit and implicit power relations created by the discourses of “us” versus “them” and to emphasize CDA as a suitable research framework in this specific study, these factors make a critical engagement with the texts all but inevitable. Instead of focusing on the frequency or amount of emphasis on us and them in leaders’ speeches, using CDA opens up space to explore the political-psychological aspects of populist political discourses.

3.2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

In the 1990s, academics including van Dijk, Fairclough, Kress, van Leeuwen, and Wodak proposed the concept of CDA. van Dijk viewed CDA as the umbrella term for a particular methodology that originated in critical linguistics and critical semiotics and may be used to the analysis of both speech and text.³³⁹ He also considered the socio-political and oppositional examination of language, discourse, and communication as the core of this approach.³⁴⁰ Discourse analyzers (or CDAs) start with the premise that language usage is always social and, as a result, both shape and reflect society. One of CDA’s objectives is to shed light on the linguistic-discourse component of late-modern social and cultural phenomena and change

³³⁵ Ibid., 2.

³³⁶ Moira Chimombo and Robert L. Roseberry, *The Power of Discourse: An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2013).

³³⁷ Hina Manzoor, Sumera Saeed, and Abdul Hameed Panhwar, “Use of Discourse Analysis in Various Disciplines,” *International Journal of English Linguistics* 9, no. 3 (2019).

³³⁸ Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 2013.

³³⁹ Teun A. van Dijk, “Aims of Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Japanese Discourse* 1, no. 1 (1995).

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

processes.³⁴¹ CDA can be used both as a theory and as a method to describe, comprehend, and clarify relationships between language and society. It varies from earlier approaches to discourse analysis in that it provides an explanation of why and how discourses function in addition to a description and interpretation of discourse in context.³⁴²

CDA is a term used by scholars in the fields of cultural studies, sociology, and philosophy to refer to a much broader field that includes all social practices, people, and institutions that allow for or justify a particular understanding of phenomena as well as specific claims about what is “true”.³⁴³ The focus of CDA, which has roots in constructivism, is power in particular.³⁴⁴ Michel Foucault’s discourse studies, for instance, demonstrated how certain discourses systematically generate interpretations of social reality.³⁴⁵ At this level, discourse analysis includes not just analyzing the text and the social uses of language but also examining the ways in which certain institutions and human roles are made feasible by particular ways of thinking and speaking.

Discourse is socially conditioned and socially constructive; it creates circumstances, knowledge objects, social identities, and interactions between individuals and groups of individuals.³⁴⁶ According to Lucke, the goal or purpose of CDA is to disarticulate and analyze texts in order to challenge conventional wisdom.³⁴⁷ CDA can be seen as an attempt to critically analyze relevant textual concerns. Because it views language as a social practice, the context of language is essential. Both spoken and written materials should be critically and constructively analyzed. CDA focuses on a text-oriented form of discourse analysis and discourse, which is a significant form of social practice that, in addition to influencing other social practices and structures, recreates and modifies knowledge, identities, and social interactions, including power relations.³⁴⁸ As power, dominance, and social inequality are the main topics of study in

³⁴¹ Marianne W. Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives* (London: SAGE, 2002).

³⁴² Rebecca Rogers, “An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education,” in *An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education*, ed. Rebecca Rogers (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³⁴³ Franck Amoussou and Ayodele A. Allagbe, “Principles, Theories and Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis,” *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature* 6, no. 1 (2018).; Gunther Kress, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 11 (1990).

³⁴⁴ John P. O’Regan and Malcolm N. MacDonald, “The Antinomies of Power in Critical Discourse Analysis,” in *Critical Discourse Analysis: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009).

³⁴⁵ Derek Hook, “Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality, History: Foucault and Discourse Analysis,” *Theory & Psychology* 11, no. 4 (2001).

³⁴⁶ Ruth Wodak, “The Semiotics of Racism: A Critical Discourse-Historical Analysis,” in *Discourse, of Course: An Overview of Research in Discourse Studies*, ed. Jan Renkema (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), 37.

³⁴⁷ Allan Lucke, “Text and Discourse Analysis,” *AERA Publication* 21 (1996): 20.

³⁴⁸ Jørgensen and Phillips, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

CDA, the term “critical” primarily refers to the investigation of power relations in text and voice. van Dijk identified CDA as an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary area of study with an emphasis on politics and culture that examines how discourse and society interact.³⁴⁹ At this point, it is worth noting that both Erdoğan’s and Orbán’s discourses, especially their references in religious-cultural contexts, serve as illustrative examples of this dimension of CDA, as will be discussed in the following sections.

Establishing linkages between textual characteristics, discourse practices’ futures, text generation, consumption, and dissemination, and broader sociocultural practice is the goal of CDA.³⁵⁰ Its secondary goal is not to offer conclusive solutions, but rather to broaden horizons, make us aware of our own weaknesses, and help us see our own unconscious goals or motives as well as those of others. It examines actual, frequently prolonged instances of social interaction that include language overtones. It is a tool for people who are trying to cope with the isolating and incapacitating effects of changes forced upon them. According to this approach, spoken or written materials that represent interactions, talks, dialogues, or exchanges regarding the subjects being studied should be critically analyzed.³⁵¹ CDA is particularly interested in and driven by the effort to grasp urgent social challenges.³⁵² According to Wodak and Mayer CDA emphasizes the necessity for multidisciplinary research in order to properly comprehend how language acts in creating and disseminating knowledge in organizing social organizations.³⁵³ Human beings utilize texts to make sense of their reality and to develop social acts and interactions in the work of everyday life.³⁵⁴ CDA examines the root causes and long-term effects of problems. Therefore, it necessitates a careful analysis of the connections between text, conversation, society, and culture.³⁵⁵ It seeks to expose the politics and reason behind the support or criticism of a certain study methodology, claim, or value.³⁵⁶ In this respect, the speeches delivered by leaders during election periods, examined in this thesis, were selected from the official government and presidential websites, where speeches made during rallies or campaign events were transcribed and published in writing.

³⁴⁹ van Dijk, “Aims of Critical Discourse Analysis”.

³⁵⁰ Fairclough, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, 87.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 107.

³⁵² Teun A. van Dijk, “Discourse, Context, and Cognition,” *Discourse Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006).

³⁵³ Wodak and Meyer, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, 7.

³⁵⁴ Lucke, “Text and Discourse Analysis”, 12.

³⁵⁵ Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2000): 448.

³⁵⁶ Terry Locke, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004).

The success of CDA may be gauged using the standard of linguistics research because it is primarily situated in a linguistic context. In spoken texts like dialogues, language may be used to convey the opinions, views, and ideas of speakers.³⁵⁷ If CDA is able to account for the function of language, verbal skills, discourse, or communicative events in the construction of domination and inequality, then it will be able to offer a major and distinctive addition to critical social or political analyses.³⁵⁸ Structures of texts and speech are the main focus here in theory and practice. The goal is to ascertain how the listening, speaking, reading, and writing processes relate to the actual text. As a result, it gives the ability to analyze written content critically, including the researchers' own words and writing. Given the influence of the written and spoken word, CDA is essential for describing, interpreting, analyzing, and critiquing social life as it is mirrored in text.³⁵⁹ The question of power and the social battles that result from it can be understood to hold a fundamental place in the analysis process when taking into account how Fairclough defines and explains CDA. In their explanation on this matter, Wodak and Meyer express that language alone lacks power since people in positions of authority must also utilize language to be effective.³⁶⁰ CDA targets power elites; therefore, it is also seen as a critique of social order.³⁶¹

There is no standardized method for data collection in CDA. Literature does not offer precise and distinct analytical frameworks for conducting research in CDA. As a result, researchers do not rely on pre-defined data collection and analytical methods.³⁶² CDA is situated in the hermeneutic tradition rather than the analytical-deductive tradition, which makes it difficult to differentiate between data collection and analysis.³⁶³ Instead, CDA is a collection of methods with a shared theoretical foundation and research interests.³⁶⁴ While some researchers use methods unrelated to sociolinguistics, others do not disclose their data-collection methodology.

³⁵⁷ Tebogo Mogashoa, "Understanding Critical Discourse Analysis in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education* 1, no. 7 (2014): 105.

³⁵⁸ van Dijk, "Discourse, Context, and Cognition", 279.; Sue L. T. McGregor, *Critical Discourse Analysis: A Primer* (Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University, 2010).

³⁵⁹ McGregor, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

³⁶⁰ Wodak and Meyer, "Critical Discourse Analysis".

³⁶¹ van Dijk, "Discourse, Context, and Cognition".

³⁶² Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," *Discourse & Society* 5 (1994).; Amoussou and Allagbe, "Principles, Theories and Approaches".

³⁶³ Ruth Wodak, "Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis," *Zeitschrift für Angewandte Linguistik* 36, no. 10 (2002).; Ruth Wodak and Gilbert Weiss, "Analyzing European Union Discourses: Theories and Applications," in *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis: Theory, Methodology and Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Paul A. Chilton (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008).

³⁶⁴ Robyn Henderson, "A Faircloughian Approach to CDA: Principled Eclecticism or a Method Searching for a Theory?" *Melbourne Studies in Education* 46 (2005).

Unlike grounded theory, CDA does not view data collection as a distinct stage that must be completed before analysis begins.³⁶⁵ Instead, initial analyses are conducted, indicators for specific concepts are identified, and concepts are expanded into categories after the first exercise in data collection. In practice, a CDA study focuses on those features of a written or spoken text that can change as a result of social power dynamics. These features include stress and intonation, word order, lexical style, coherence, local semantic moves such as disclaimers, topic choice, speech acts, schematic organization, rhetorical figures, syntactic structures, propositional structures, turn-taking, repairs, and hesitation.³⁶⁶

According to Fairclough, social realities have a reflexive quality, meaning that how people perceive, construe, interpret, and conceptualize social realities is a component of those realities.³⁶⁷ In other words, there are no social events or practices without representations, construal, conceptualizations, or theories of those events and practices. To put it another way, CDA views discourse as a type of social practice and assumes that discourse has a dialectical connection with the social structures in which it is embedded.³⁶⁸

Discourse in CDA is a social practice that is both a result of and comprise the aspects of social world conditions, institutions, events, social identities, and connections among individuals or individual groups. According to Wodak and Meyer, it is “fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language”.³⁶⁹ Discourse analysis, according to Fairclough, is concerned not just with power dynamics or conflicts in discourse, but also with how these conflicts shape and alter social and institutional discourse practices.³⁷⁰ Being critical is essential for CDA because “relationships between discursive, social, and cultural change are typically not transparent for the people involved” and CDA’s purpose is to reveal hidden causes and links in it.³⁷¹

An essential component of a critical analysis is the comprehension and exposure of power relations. In order to understand how discourse (re)produces social dominance, CDA scholars

³⁶⁵ Michael Farrelly, “Rethinking Intertextuality in CDA,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 17, no. 4 (2020).

³⁶⁶ van Dijk, “Aims of Critical Discourse Analysis”.

³⁶⁷ Fairclough, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, 9.

³⁶⁸ Jørgensen and Phillips, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

³⁶⁹ Wodak and Meyer, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, 10.

³⁷⁰ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 36.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

frequently examine how people in authority utilize language.³⁷² Van Dijk focuses on ideological discourse structures in the discourse component since CDA is concerned in power relations and the texts and dialogues under consideration are thought to be ideologically motivated. Polarization, pronouns, identification, the focus on positive self-descriptions and negative other-descriptions, activities —what they do, what they should do —norms and ideals, and interests are some of the most notable examples of these ideological discourse systems. Following this rationale, in the scope of this particular study, populist political discourse should be separately examined within the framework of what has been expressed for CDA.

3.3. Populist Political Discourse

Political discourses and the acts that create them are ideological. Political leaders and their parties must be ideologically aware since they use ideological discourses to fight against other groups, obtain power, and exceed. In the discourse component, Van Dijk highlights the significance of ideological structures, given that CDA focuses on power dynamics and treats texts and speech as inherently ideological. These structures include polarization, the strategic use of pronouns, processes of identification, the emphasis on positive self-representation and negative portrayal of others, actions and expectations, underlying norms and values, and specific interests.³⁷³ According to him, ideas are made visible by discourses, and much like other ideologies, political ideologies can only be stated, developed, spread, and challenged through discourse.³⁷⁴ Hence, for populist leaders, Orbán and Erdoğan in this study, discourses are the most effective and significant vehicles for transmitting and mobilizing their citizens during election periods. These are the most suitable times to mobilize the people, and even politicians who have made mistakes before the elections have a chance to turn the momentum that is going against them to their advantage with the discourse they use during election periods. Therefore, paying utmost attention to the rhetoric of populist leaders during election periods has the potential to turn the election results in their favor.

Political discourses may serve only political purposes when they are used in conjunction with political processes or actions, such as legislating or ruling, that have very clear political objectives, such as supporting or opposing a piece of legislation or winning an election.³⁷⁵ Political subjects must thus possess political knowledge and agree on common standards,

³⁷² Wodak and Meyer, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, 9.

³⁷³ van Dijk, “Discourse, Context, and Cognition”.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

values, and beliefs in addition to political ideology. In-group, out-group polarization in politics is achieved by the selection of issues that are more favorable to “our” group or party and the accentuation of the disadvantages of the out-group, such as political rivals.³⁷⁶ Moreover, word arrangement, heading, topicalization, repetition, intonation or stress, visual or graphical aids, and other elements can all improve understanding. For instance, in most of the European countries’ politics, hence in Hungarian politics, migrants coming from the Middle East and Africa, minorities and immigrants are frequently linked to issues and crimes in political discourse and framed as in the out-group. As for the Turkish politics, the main opposition party in the parliament and other dissidents who are under the impact of outsiders or outside powers, are settled in out-group frame. The difference between Hungarian and Turkish political discourse will be detailed later.

Debates about populism involve various perspectives on its definition, with the current emphasis shifting toward considerable controversy over the methods used to measure it. When examining populism from a discursive perspective, it becomes evident that there is limited consensus on its ontological nature.³⁷⁷ Various methodological approaches and techniques exhibit substantive differences. Three perspectives on populism can be classified, each representing contemporary attempts to evaluate populism from a rhetorical frame. The first is the poststructuralist approach rooted in Laclau’s theory, the second is a mixed approach combining positivism with hermeneutic techniques in holistic grading, and the third is content analysis—a more classical and quantitative approach involving the counting of phrases within texts.³⁷⁸ Despite their distinctions, these approaches share some commonalities: a similar concept of populism, an acknowledgment that structural factors trigger populist discourse, and the identification of a leader as a catalyst for it.³⁷⁹

The increasing prevalence of the term populism in political analysis and beyond is now a widespread phenomenon. This shift to populism not only involves investigating populist politics as a subject of study but also involves adopting populism as an analytical framework.³⁸⁰ It is important to explicitly address the issues raised by treating populism as an independent

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Mario E. Poblete, “How to Assess Populist Discourse through Three Current Approaches,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20, no. 2 (2015).

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 201.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Benjamin De Cleen and Jason Glynn, “Beyond Populism Studies,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 20, no. 1 (2021).

subject and to consider the consequences of such an interpretation for the field of populism studies.

Various methods can be employed to convey discourse structures, which differ across genres. The rhetorical method, corporal linguistics, and CDA are three important currents in the study of political speech.³⁸¹ For instance, when the focus is on “our good things and their bad things”, techniques such as foregrounding, headlines, active sentences, hyperbole, and repetition can be employed to highlight and amplify positive aspects. Conversely, strategies like implicit information, small letters, passive sentences, euphemisms, and backgrounding can be used to downplay and minimize negative aspects.³⁸²

In terms of epistemology, three approaches can be distinguished based on their methods for assessing populist discourse. Poststructuralism has consistently faced methodological limitations due to the absence of clearly defined research strategies. Nonetheless, as suggested by David Howarth, this approach should be interpreted within a hermeneutic framework, requiring researchers to conduct second-order interpretations of the actions and social practices under examination.³⁸³ The second approach also advocates for a hermeneutic approach to accessing discourse, but within a positivist research context. Consequently, it becomes feasible to uncover the latent meaning of the text through interpretative analysis, allowing subsequent classification of evidence according to predefined positivist categories. Conversely, the third approach adheres strictly to a positivist and quantitative stance, involving the encoding of phrases and/or words in texts, enabling analysts to categorize them based on their degree of populist intensity.³⁸⁴

In terms of spatial orientation, populism is structured along a vertical axis denoting power, status, and hierarchical socio-cultural and/or socio-economic positioning, expressed as a down/up or high/low orientation.³⁸⁵ Populist discourse commonly employs terms like “the

³⁸¹ Ponton, “Movements and Meanings”.

³⁸² Giray Gerim, *Nationalist Discourses in Hungary and Türkiye under Right-Wing Domination: The Cases of Fidesz and the AK Party* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2022).

³⁸³ David Howarth, “Applying Discourse Theory: The Method of Articulation,” in *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, ed. David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³⁸⁴ Poblete, “How to Assess Populist Discourse”, 202.

³⁸⁵ Torben Bech Dyrberg, “Radical and Plural Democracy: In Defence of Right/Left and Public Reason,” in *Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack*, ed. Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).; Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: New Left Books, 1977).; Pierre Ostiguy, *The High-Low Political Divide: Rethinking Populism and Anti-Populism*, Committee on Concepts and Methods Working Paper Series, no. 35 (Mexico City: International Political Science Association, 2009).

people” and “the elite” to signify these vertical identities, but it also utilizes various other labels. The key element is that populists assert to advocate for the “ordinary people”, “the little man”, “the common man”, or “the man in the street” as the down-group or underdog. Simultaneously, they reject “the establishment”, “the political caste”, or “the ruling class” as the upper group, arguing that these entities fail to represent “the people” and jeopardize their interests. In discourses dominated by populism, where the structural dynamics adhere to the populist logic of uniting diverse demands and identities within a populist chain of equivalence, formed in a down/up contrast with an elite, “the people” not only holds a central position in the discursive articulation but also functions as an empty signifier. In essence, “the people” operates as an expression without a fixed meaning or reference.³⁸⁶

Laclau’s conceptualization of populism has exerted considerable influence in the examination of populist politics, even if this impact has not consistently been acknowledged explicitly.³⁸⁷ For Laclau, populism ultimately evolves into a synonymous concept with politics itself³⁸⁸, prompting consideration of how to differentiate between the two concepts.³⁸⁹ In contrast to Laclau’s perspective³⁹⁰, this interpretation regards populism as a specific type of politics.

More than alternative approaches, a discourse-theoretical definition places emphasis on how populism verbally constructs “the people” by setting up an antagonistic dynamic between “the people” and “the elite”. It explicitly underscores the active construction of “the people” in comparison to ideational interpretations of populism as a (thin) ideology, such as those proposed by Mudde and Stanley.³⁹¹ This shift from ideology to the discursive construction and assertion of representing “the people” by populists enables a more comprehensive consideration of populism’s vital strategic aspects³⁹², along with its material, performative, and affective

³⁸⁶ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005a), 69–72 and 161–163.

³⁸⁷ Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis, “Left-Wing Populism in the European Periphery: The Case of SYRIZA,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19, no. 2 (2014): 122.

³⁸⁸ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 67.

³⁸⁹ Benjamin Ardit, “Post-Hegemony: Politics Outside the Usual Post-Marxist Paradigm,” in *Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today*, ed. Ana Cecilia Dinerstein and María do Mar Castro Varela (London: Routledge, 2016).; Jon Beasley-Murray, “Review of *On Populist Reason*, by Ernesto Laclau, and *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 5 (2006).; Yannis Stavrakakis, “Antinomies of Formalism: Laclau’s Theory of Populism and the Lessons from Religious Populism in Greece,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 263.

³⁹⁰ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.; Ernesto Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name?” in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005b).

³⁹¹ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).; Ben Stanley, “The Thin Ideology of Populism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 1 (2008).

³⁹² Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, “Left-Wing Populism in the European Periphery”.; Ben Stanley, “The Thin Ideology of Populism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 1 (2008).

dimensions.³⁹³ Nevertheless, this discourse-theoretical definition resembles the “thin ideology” definition developed by Mudde and others due to its “minimal” nature. It concentrates on the opposition between “the people” and “the elite” and on the populist claim to represent “the people” excluding all other (ideological) characteristics of specific populist politics.³⁹⁴

Adopting a discourse-theoretical standpoint, populist politics adheres to a specific political logic. According to Glynos and Howarth, these logics are “constructed and named by the analyst” to recognize and comprehend the “rules or grammar of a practice under study”.³⁹⁵ Viewing populism as a political logic entails identifying how it addresses and mobilizes individuals, articulating demands, and challenging existing regimes or upholding power relations.³⁹⁶ Examining populism through the lens of a particular logic, as Laclau referred to it as “the populist reason”, formalizes the understanding of populism. This shift directs attention away from the specifics of populism—such as the concrete demands put forth by populist actors or their ideology.³⁹⁷ The inquiry shifts to understanding the distinctive aspects of how populists articulate their demands. Beyond the central theme of the antagonistic relationship between “the people” and “the elite”, populists unite various demands and identities in what Laclau and Mouffe call a “chain of equivalence”, symbolized by the signifier “people”.³⁹⁸ Populists mobilize and concurrently amplify or strengthen discontent with “the elite” due to its (actual and/or perceived) obstruction or threat to various demands, interests, or identities.³⁹⁹

To comprehend the widespread prevalence of discourses on populism and the impactful outcomes of these discourses, it is essential to move beyond normative intentions. Instead, a closer examination of dynamics within the academic discourse on populism and its interplay with media and politics becomes crucial. Going beyond populism studies in this context entails that studies on populism should not exclusively concentrate on the populist aspect of the politics they examine. Instead, the analysis should be broadened to encompass how populism intersects

³⁹³ Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*.

³⁹⁴ Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis, “Distinctions and Articulations: A Discourse Theoretical Framework for the Study of Populism and Nationalism,” *Javnost – The Public* 24, no. 4 (2017): 311 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2017.1330083>.

³⁹⁵ Jason Glynos and David Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007), 136.

³⁹⁶ Jason Glynos, “Ideological Fantasy at Work,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 3 (2008): 278.

³⁹⁷ Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name?,” 33.

³⁹⁸ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001).

³⁹⁹ Stanley, “The Thin Ideology of Populism”, 98.; Benjamin Moffitt, “How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism,” *Government and Opposition* 50, no. 2 (2015).

with other dimensions like nationalism, socialism, conservatism, and more. Additionally, it should consider the broader political, cultural, economic, and social context within which these politics unfold. This approach also suggests treating populism as a valuable yet limited concept that should be incorporated into a more extensive conceptual framework. The specific components of this framework depend on the characteristics of populist politics under scrutiny and the nature of the research questions posed. At this point, considering the question of this work, examining populism from the political psychological perspective will also add another dimension to populism studies.

3.4. Political Psychology and Discourse Analysis

Political psychology has consistently been centered around addressing problems. Regardless of where its origins are traced, it emerges from social issues and enigmas that manifest throughout history and in specific contexts. Van Ginneken asserts that political psychology revolves around the need for control, regulation, and understanding, a characteristic shared by various scientific pursuits.⁴⁰⁰ Over time, significant historical events have shaped entire research agendas. In political psychology, issues related to race, ethnicity, and racism have surfaced in distinct historical and structural contexts, giving rise to diverse sets of concerns.⁴⁰¹ Since its inception as an academic discipline in the 1970s, political psychologists have found it analytically beneficial to create spatial maps of the field. Specifically, they aim to trace the origins, evolution, and influence of political psychology across various countries⁴⁰² and regions.⁴⁰³

In cultural studies, sociology, philosophy, and social studies, the term discourse analysis is employed by researchers to encompass a broader domain. This includes all social practices, individuals, and institutions that facilitate or legitimize a specific understanding of phenomena

⁴⁰⁰ Jaap Van Ginneken, "Outline of a Cultural History of Political Psychology," in *The Psychology of Politics* (New York: Springer, 1988), 6.

⁴⁰¹ Paul Nesbitt-Larking and Catarina Kinnvall, "The Discursive Frames of Political Psychology," *Political Psychology* 33, no. 1 (2012).

⁴⁰² Ofer Feldman, "Political Psychology in Japan," *Political Psychology* 11 (1990).; James W. Lamare and Thomas W. Milburn, "Political Psychology in New Zealand," *Political Psychology* 11, no. 3 (1990).; Paul Nesbitt-Larking, "Political Psychology in Canada," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 1 (2004).; Shumao Wang, "Political Psychology in China," *Political Psychology* 17, no. 4 (1996).

⁴⁰³ Tom Bryder, "Political Psychology in Western Europe," in *Political Psychology: Contemporary Problems and Issues*, ed. Margaret G. Hermann (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986).; Catarina Kinnvall, "'Not Here, Not Now': The Absence of a European Perestroika Movement," in *Perestroika!: The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science*, ed. Kristen Renwick Monroe (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).; Maritza Montero, "Political Psychology in Latin America," in *Political Psychology: Contemporary Problems and Issues*, ed. Margaret G. Hermann (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986).; Lucian W. Pye, "Political Psychology in Asia," in *Political Psychology: Contemporary Problems and Issues*, ed. Margaret G. Hermann (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986).

and enable the articulation of certain claims about what is deemed “true”. Discourse analysis, deeply rooted in constructivism, emphasizes power dynamics. For instance, Michel Foucault’s discourse analyses demonstrated how specific discourses systematically construct versions of the social world.⁴⁰⁴ At this level, discourse analysis in general not only scrutinizes text and the social functions of language but also investigates how the very existence of particular institutions and the roles assigned to individuals is made possible by prevailing modes of thinking and speaking.⁴⁰⁵ Discourse analysis involves examining how speech and written language are employed to accomplish various actions. Discursive psychology applies concepts from discourse analysis to psychological issues, presenting a perspective that encompasses meta-theoretical, theoretical, and analytical principles. Unlike a specific method, it focuses on Chomsky’s initial differentiation: while cognitive and social psychology predominantly address people’s inherent competence, discursive psychology prioritizes the study of performance.⁴⁰⁶

Within political psychology, two primary approaches compete for dominance: positivism and constructionism/interpretivism.⁴⁰⁷ Positivist social science, originating in the works of Comte and Durkheim, employs rationalist and technical tools akin to those in the natural sciences. It aims to unveil evolutionary laws that elucidate observed phenomena, either through empirical observation (positivist empiricism) or deductive logic (logical positivism). The influence of these traditions is evident in a revised form of positivism that blends Comte’s focus on empirical verifiability with Hume’s (and subsequently Durkheim’s) theory of causality.⁴⁰⁸ Comte and Durkheim laid the groundwork for positivism, while Hegel and Marx introduced non-positivist, interpretivist research methods, later encompassed under terms like constructionism, critical theory, and structuralism. These theories were developed in response to the evolving landscape of urban and industrial modernity. Interpretivist approaches prioritize etic comprehension of human actions over external forces that may lack significance those involved. Interpretivism recognizes the distinction between people as subjects and the objects studied in natural sciences, emphasizing the necessity of understanding subjective meanings to comprehend social action. The fundamental contrast between positivist and interpretivist perspectives lies in their

⁴⁰⁴ Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace, *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁴⁰⁵ Bob Hodge, “Discourse Analysis”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Systemic Functional Linguistics*, ed. Tom Bartlett and Gerard O’Grady (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁴⁰⁶ Jonathan Potter, “Discourse Analysis and Discursive Psychology,” in *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol. 2: Research Designs—Quantitative, Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological*, ed. Harris Cooper et al. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012).

⁴⁰⁷ Nesbitt-Larking and Kinnvall, “The Discursive Frames”.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

respective focuses on explanation versus understanding human behavior.⁴⁰⁹ Constructionism (or constructivism) emerges as an ontological stance derived from interpretivism, asserting that social actors continually shape social phenomena and their meanings. This implies that such phenomena and categories not only arise from social interaction but are also in a constant state of flux. The constructionist approach accommodates the perspectives of social scientists, whose knowledge is seen as uncertain, and their descriptions of the social world are considered constructions in themselves. The convergence of the two aspects of social science, positivist and interpretivist, occurs in the synthesis attributed to Weber, who stands as the initial—and for an extended period, the sole—scholar to integrate both epistemologies. Zeitlin’s examination of the history of sociological theory designates Weber as the scholar who reconciled a materialist and an ideational explanation of the development of modern societies.⁴¹⁰

Tileagă has emphasized the significance of a critical political psychology, asserting that discursive psychology holds substantial potential in this regard.⁴¹¹ While political psychology is flourishing, it tends to prioritize mainstream, quantitative research methods and epistemology, often neglecting the broader array of non-quantitative approaches.⁴¹² The discursive frames within the different research hubs in political psychology are naturally contextualized. This means they are rooted in the knowledge, values, and phenomenologies specific to the times and locations where political psychology has emerged.⁴¹³ A significant portion of the initial research in discursive psychology has concentrated on the examination of political discourse.⁴¹⁴ The foundational text for discursive psychology frequently draws on instances of political discourse to illustrate its key points, especially when advocating for a discursive psychology approach to fact construction.⁴¹⁵ Subsequently, fact construction has been a recurring theme in various discursive psychology studies, including those explore

⁴⁰⁹ Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁴¹⁰ Irving Zeitlin, *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 197–199.

⁴¹¹ Cristian Tileagă, *Political Psychology: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Nesbitt-Larking and Kinnvall, “The Discursive Frames”.

⁴¹⁴ Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, “Accomplishing Attitudes: Fact and Evaluation in Racist Discourse,” *Text: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse* 8, nos. 1–2 (1988).; Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation* (New York: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1992).

⁴¹⁵ Derek Edwards and Jonathan Potter, *Discursive Psychology* (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

political subjects.⁴¹⁶ Adopting a social constructionist stance, discursive psychology focuses on scrutinizing psychological phenomena as contextualized discursive actions. Discursive psychology investigates how psychological discourse is employed and directed in conversations and examines in depth the achievements people make in interactions, rather than using this information to draw conclusions about cognition.⁴¹⁷

To conclude, the methods of dissertation, CDA, and discursive psychology used in political psychology studies overlap in their purposes. In this respect, the CDA discussed within the framework of the study is a suitable method for making sense of international relations' political psychology in the context of leaders' populist discourses as intended. The integration of CDA with discursive psychology provides a valuable lens through which to examine studies in political psychology. Furthermore, when combined with CDA, interpretive research methods provide a framework for exploring political psychology and analyzing the potential impact of leaders' rhetoric on electoral outcomes. As Le Bon noted, "the masses are vulnerable to persuasion and seduction", meaning that selective elites could use polarizing language or nationalism to influence and manipulate public sentiment.⁴¹⁸ As indicated earlier, studies in literature on political psychology and discourse analysis have often remained predominantly quantitative. However, the use of interpretive methods to draw inferences from data collected by researchers in social sciences has the potential to contribute to literature from a different perspective.

3. 5. Data Collection

The idea of political style is not a modern invention. It has ancient roots, going back to Aristotle, where rhetorical expertise, persuasive presentations, and the effective communication of a political message to secure votes are age-old aspects of politics. Examining style and performance as subjects amenable to analysis through sociolinguistics and discourse analysis is crucial for comprehending the construction of identity.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ Nick Lynn and Susan Lea, "'A Phantom Menace and the New Apartheid': The Social Construction of Asylum-Seekers in the United Kingdom," *Discourse & Society* 14, no. 4 (2003).; Shani Burke and Mirko A. Demasi, "Applying Discursive Psychology to 'Fact' Construction in Political Discourse," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 13, no. 5 (2019).

⁴¹⁷ Edwards and Potter, *Discursive Psychology*.

⁴¹⁸ Le Bon, *Kitleler Psikolojisi*.

⁴¹⁹ Mats Ekström, Maria Patrona, and Joanna Thornborrow, "Right-Wing Populism and the Dynamics of Style: A Discourse-Analytic Perspective on Mediated Political Performances," *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0101-7>.

In democracies, elections are the main method of gaining power, and election campaigns seek to affect the choices made by voters. Being convincing is one of the most important aspects and primary purposes of speeches used by politicians to try to persuade the public to support their programs and cast ballots during the election phase.⁴²⁰ As a result, they ought to explain how they have addressed certain problems and ideas and clearly state both their own and their political party's stances.

The research focuses on the 2018 and 2022 general elections for Hungary and the 2018 and 2023 general elections for Türkiye. It has a purpose in terms of the logic of comparative analysis rather than random election years. This study focuses solely on the discourse of the governing parties' leaders, and in the Turkish case, the President at the same time, as Erdoğan has a dual role of being both the governing party's leader and the president. The main goal is to objectively assess the impact of the rhetoric of two leaders who both seek to maintain their parties' hold on power. In order to do this, the research primarily looks at the campaign periods leading up to the general elections in the specified years. The discourses analyzed in this study were selected solely from official written transcripts published on the websites of the prime ministries and presidencies of both countries. The statements of the leaders were examined within the framework of foreign policymaking during the election campaign periods, focusing particularly on the excerpts that explicitly articulated the dichotomy of "us and them". These sections were examined using CDA, which, by its nature, provides fertile analytical ground not only for revealing the discursive construction of populist narratives but also for uncovering their underlying political-psychological dimensions.

The elections held on June 24, 2018, were the first general elections in Türkiye in which the Presidential Government System, which was adopted in the referendum on April 16, 2017, and held after the 2016 coup attempt, was put into effect. This situation can be considered as one of the most important elections in Turkish political history⁴²¹, as it includes many new regulations that carry a potential to affect the voting behavior of the voters. The 2023 elections were also an appropriate time to examine the effects of populist discourses on political psychology, as they were held under the shadow of economic depression, earthquakes, and decrees with the force of law issued during the state of emergency.

⁴²⁰ Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor* (London: Springer, 2011).; Ponton, "Movements and Meanings".

⁴²¹ Fahrettin Altun, "Laying the Cornerstone for a New Turkey: The June 24 Elections," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 3 (2018): 89–103.

For Hungary, the 2018 elections were the first general elections to test whether Orbán could regain the dominance his ruling party had lost after 2014, his Fidesz-KDNP alliance lost its two-thirds parliamentary supermajority in early 2015⁴²², and whether his anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric would resonate with the public. The 2022 elections, on the other hand, were the important indicators of whether Orbán would be able to win the support of the electorate by portraying a heroic image in the shadow of the Russia-Ukraine war and what kind of country image was going to be created in the heart of Europe for the next four years.

Data collection for this study will be comprehended through the leaders' discourses while making foreign policy decisions during the times of elections. The period will comprehend the last two general election periods specifically. In the frame of this dissertation, the case countries, namely Hungary and Türkiye's leaders for foreign policy decision-making, are Viktor Orbán and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In democracies, the applicants for foreign policy making are the foreign ministers, yet, as in authoritarian and populist countries, the actual decision maker is the leader of the government party. Therefore, while focusing on the campaign speeches of leaders, the focus is on foreign policy-related discourses. This opens the way to make sense of the political psychology of populist international relations through two example countries. While the study acknowledges the subjective nature of CDA, greater transparency is needed regarding text selection. Speeches were selected based on two main criteria: (1) relevance to foreign policy discourse and (2) inclusion of populist indicators identified in previous literature. However, this manual selection process inherently carries a risk of selection bias. To mitigate this risk, a larger set of texts was examined, and only those speeches that consistently aligned with the theoretical and thematic framework were retained. Future research could implement a more systematic and replicable process, such as inter-coder alignment or peer cross-checking, to increase robustness.

In Hungary, election campaigns officially start 50 days before the election date. Accordingly, the time periods selected for analysis are 17 February - 6 April 2018 and 12 February - 3 April 2022. The official website of the Hungarian Government (*Magyarország Kormánya – Kormányzat Miniszterelnöki Kabinetiroda*)⁴²³ was used to gather and analyze the Hungarian

⁴²² Gergely Szakacs and Krisztina Than, "Hungary's Right-Wing Alliance Loses Two-Thirds Majority," *Reuters*, February 23, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/hungary-s-right-wing-alliance-loses-two-thirds-majority-idUSKBN0LR0JD/>.

⁴²³ *Kormányzat – Miniszterelnök – Hírek*, "Kormányportal", <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/hirek?items=30&page=1>.

2018 election campaign speeches. Due to the limited availability of English speeches, searches were conducted in Hungarian. When an English version was available, it was selected for analysis. In cases where no English translation was provided, speeches were manually translated from Hungarian to English using online translation tools. Since the website does not offer a filtering option by time period, I manually navigated through the pages. Since 30 rows are displayed per page, the first speech covering the election period begins on page 25 (20 speeches) and ends on page 23 (18 speeches), for a total of 68 speeches examined for 2018 campaign period. From this point on, I examined all speeches from the election period, focusing on those related to foreign policy making. Special attention was paid to speeches that included the terms “we” and “them” or expressions that evoke these concepts. Key issues such as Brussels, Soros, and immigration were specifically addressed.

For the 2022 elections, the Government of Hungary⁴²⁴ website was used again via a different link. Typically, each page contains seven speeches. The first speech in the campaign period starts on page 54 (5 speeches on this page) and ends on page 48 (3 speeches on this page). There are seven rows on each page, so a total of 43 speeches were analyzed following the same procedure as for the 2018 elections. The speeches were manually translated from Hungarian to English if no English version was available. The analysis once again focused on speeches related to foreign policymaking, emphasizing the us-versus-them framework. Key terms such as Brussels, Soros, and migration were considered following the same logic as in 2018 speeches.

As for Türkiye, the campaign period for the 2018 general elections began on May 13, 2018, with the finalization of the candidate lists. A propaganda ban was imposed on June 23, 2018, one day before the election. The speeches made during the campaign period from May 13 to June 23 were analyzed. The first speech is on page 135 (a total of 10 speeches from this page to the end of the relevant section), and the last speech is on page 131 (9 speeches). Each page contains 40 lines; in sum, a total of 139 speeches were examined. These speeches were sourced from the official website of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye⁴²⁵. All speeches were analyzed in Turkish and, as in the case of Hungary, translated into English using online translation tools. As in the case of Hungary, speeches related to foreign policymaking were selected, focusing particularly on the terms “we” and “they”. As for the 2023 elections, the

⁴²⁴ *Kormányzat – Miniszterelnök – Speciális Hírek*, <https://kormany.hu/kormanyzat/miniszterelnok/specialis-hirek>.

⁴²⁵ *Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanlığı – Haberler*, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/>.

campaign period ran from March 18, 2023, to May 13, 2023. Like in the previous election period analysis, Erdoğan's speeches were gathered from the official presidential website. The first speech for the campaign period is on page 39 (there are 33 speeches on the page), and the last speech is on page 36 (there are 32 speeches). In total, 145 speeches were examined, maintaining the same focus on foreign policymaking and "us and them" associations. Finally, it is important to note that during the analysis of the speeches of leaders from both countries, discourses that made distinctions between us and them and employed polarizing language were excluded from the discourse analysis if they were solely focused on domestic politics—specifically, the main opposition parties and leaders within each country. These sections, however, remain a relevant area for future research and could yield valuable insights. The analysis was rigorously limited to speeches or excerpts that met the two primary criteria of the dissertation: 1. The discourse must be related to foreign policymaking. 2. The discourse must explicitly articulate or implicitly evoke the us and them dichotomy.

All analyzed speeches were originally delivered in Turkish or Hungarian and translated into English for analytical purposes, where English translated texts were not available as pointed out before. The translations were carried out by the bilingual author of this study, who is contextually familiar with the political discourse of both countries. However, translation is never neutral; emotional nuance, rhetorical tone, and symbolic connotations can shift during this process. Some terms (e.g., "*millî irade*" or "*keresztény Europe*") may not be fully translated and carry deep cultural and emotional weight. This limitation has been acknowledged, and efforts have been made to remain faithful to the original meanings through context-aware translation.

No computer-based programs were used during the collection and analysis of speeches and discourses; the study was conducted entirely manually. While increasingly popular computer-aided methods in discourse analysis techniques may facilitate the process, considering the scope and focus of this study, it is more appropriate to analyze the contexts in which these discourses are communicated to their target audiences rather than examining how frequently leaders use terms such as "we" and "them". This approach is more compatible with the theoretical frameworks used in this study and provides a deeper focus on the psychological aspects of populist international relations. Furthermore, themes such as fear, heroism, the only solution, and national will, which are not explicitly expressed by leaders but emerge when their speeches are examined, can only be identified through a critical analysis of their discourses. These key

elements are essential to understanding how populist leaders construct narratives that emotionally resonate with their target audiences and solidify their political positions.

In the frame of this study, the main point and claim is that domestic politics and foreign policy are intertwined, and leaders use their speeches during foreign policy implications again to get or pursue their support from the electorate. Discourse examples have been chosen from election times. Even though leaders deliver messages to appeal to the people, in the meantime they enforce the foreign policy implications, they use “us” versus “them” dichotomy to draw a frame to make people comprehend whom they should be careful against and whom they should support for the sake of their countries’ integrity. Election times are quite fertile for populist leaders; they can easily find a ground to blame “others” for being the enemy of the pure people. Here, as discussed at the beginning of this study, representative democracy provides an opportunity for the populist leaders to justify their acts and, by pointing out the ballot boxes, they can subjectify their victory as a “ballot box victory”.

Table 1. Summary of the total speeches during the election campaign periods for both countries

Case/Election	Analyzed Campaign Period	Collected Total Speeches
Hungary 2018	Feb 17 - Apr 6, 2018	68
Hungary 2022	Feb 12 - Apr 3, 2022	43
Türkiye 2018	May 13 - Jun 23, 2018	139
Türkiye 2023	Mar 18 - May 13, 2023	145
Total Inventory	4 Campaign Periods	395

Source: Author’s own editing

3.6. Data Analysis

There are a few reasons why CDA has drawn more attention over the past 20 years. According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough, one principle can be identified as capable of supporting modern democracy by providing strategies for contesting authority over language use in social contexts.⁴²⁶ Understanding and elucidating the pivotal role of dominating political forces over certain social conceptions, like the country, requires a critical knowledge of language. Consequently, CDA can offer a useful study framework for examining linguistic dominance in connection to social notions generally, and as Wodak claims, the “critical” component can also

⁴²⁶ Chouliaraki and Fairclough, *Discourse in Late Modernity*.

be interpreted as a reference to the researcher's position.⁴²⁷ Political discourse analysis is by definition crucial as the researcher's political perspective cannot be fully understood and political language cannot be analyzed without the researcher's political intuitions.⁴²⁸ Nonetheless, some view CDA as a separate kind of political activity carried out in the name of social justice, liberation, etc. Since they must remain the focus of any research, such a "critical" knowledge is unable to offer fresh viewpoints or enhance the comprehension of human nature, particularly our political nature. This method is used in this study to critically analyze pertinent discourse. Since CDA involves interpretation, the possibility of subjectivity was taken into account during the research. To minimize bias, only formal and written versions of speeches were used, and the same methodology was applied to both case studies. The analysis followed a clear set of theoretical and methodological guidelines to ensure consistency and transparency. These steps were taken to make the findings more reliable, recognizing that complete objectivity is not possible in discourse analysis.

The analytical approach used in this work is CDA, a qualitative, interpretive, and constructivist method that emphasizes in-depth semantic and hermeneutic analysis over quantitative frequency counts. This methodological choice is essential for the study's objective: to examine the political and psychological aspects and discourse strategies of populist leaders' discourses, particularly the "us versus them" dichotomy in foreign policy. The data analysis will be based on the discourses of the leaders through the method of CDA analysis, as mentioned above. The main pragmatic reasons for choosing this method are that CDA provides a logical and convenient framework for studying political psychology and populist discourses together. In this way, by focusing on the distinction between us and them in leaders' discourse, it is shown what messages they actually convey to the people they address and thus how they choose foreign policy discourses to influence domestic politics.

While quantitative measures such as word frequency counts are useful for large-scale linguistic research, they often fall short in capturing the context, purpose, nuance, and rhetorical function of specific discourses. The central theme of this research is that certain themes, such as fear, heroism, the "only solution", and the national will, are often implicitly shaped by leaders. These

⁴²⁷ Wodak, "Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis".

⁴²⁸ Paul Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Paul Chilton, "From Mind to Grammar: Coordinate Systems, Prepositions, Constructions," in *Language, Cognition and Space: The State of the Art and New Directions*, ed. Vyvyan Evans and Paul Chilton (London: Equinox Publishing, 2010).

latent rhetorical structures, key to understanding emotional connection with target audiences, cannot be fully identified or critically analyzed by simply counting explicit keywords. Therefore, this study utilizes a comprehensive hermeneutic approach, focusing not on how frequently language occurs but on how it is strategically used within its specific socio-political context. This study will investigate how the chosen texts operationalize and build the us and them narrative in the political arena using the socio-linguistic method that serves as its primary axis. This will expose the particular and shared elements of the populist language of the two leaders as well as the discursive structures of the divided society. It should be noted that, while the theoretical chapter's insights and the analytical tools drawn from CDA offer a framework for both analyses, the research relies' on interpretative reading and analysis within this framework.

It performs a thorough semantic analysis of the case data in place of quantitative evaluations like frequency analysis and statistical computations. According to this inclination, a comprehensive hermeneutic method is used to study the texts from each case as a whole. Instead of identifying keywords and using a broad coding scheme based on them, the research will look at every passage where the words "us" and "them" are directly mentioned, as well as every pertinent passage that provides an opportunity to reveal the populist strategies of the leaders. Therefore, the goal is to determine the types of semantic networks and linkages that populist discourses are made up of in the examples examined in this thesis, as well as the effects of these networks.

The study has some restrictions on language use. All analyses will be conducted on translated texts, with the Hungarian case also including texts originally written in English. Since the chosen methodology and approach are confined to semantic analysis and do not extend to a comprehensive semiotic analysis, encompassing syntax and pragmatics alongside semantics⁴²⁹, the influence of the original languages' characteristics will be relatively limited. While it is evident that eliminating the potential negative effects of this situation on the study is unlikely, every effort will be made to minimize their impact.

Furthermore, it should be noted that multiple approaches may be used to critically analyze the texts taken into consideration in this study, or even the same technique used on the same texts

⁴²⁹ Dagfinn Føllesdal, "Semantics and Semiotics," in *Structures and Norms in Science: Volume Two of the Tenth International Congress of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science, Florence, August 1995*, ed. Maria Luisa Dalla Chiara, Karl G. Engesser, and F. Albert (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1997).

might provide rather different results. Since interpretation is a subjective process in qualitative research, the point of subjectivity is constantly questioned in this technique, as in virtually all other qualitative research methodologies.⁴³⁰ Being open and honest about the methods used for data selection, collection, and processing is the only way to solve this problem, and this methodological chapter aims to achieve this very goal.

⁴³⁰ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 405.

CHAPTER 4. HUNGARIAN CASE

4.1. Rising Right-wing Populism in Hungary

4.1.1. Historical Background

Hungary's government has experienced two regime changes, the first to communism in 1949 and the second to democracy in 1989, and these transitions have profoundly impacted political memory. Each change in leadership altered what was considered real, sparking concerns about the country's future. This persistent sense of unease, combined with the fear of losing sovereignty, has long fueled populist rhetoric.⁴³¹ It was within this historical and psychological context that Orbán successfully framed himself as the only leader capable of restoring Hungary's national dignity and stability.

The roots of populism in Hungary predate the democratic transition of 1989. A comprehensive historical understanding of populism can explain the evolution of Hungarian political culture. To understand the origins of these populist ideas, it is helpful to consider the Horthy regime, which laid the groundwork for later nationalist and exclusionary ideas. The Horthy regime (1919–1944) during the interwar period exhibited characteristics that could be described as proto-populist. Miklós Horthy's rule was based on irredentism, anti-communism, and the defense of Christian national values. He drew a moral distinction between the pure Hungarian nation and its enemies at home and abroad.⁴³² This rhetoric carried religious and civilizational connotations, portraying Hungary as the last bastion of Christian Europe.⁴³³ The cult of Trianon, a major part of the regime's ideology, viewed the loss of territory after World War I as a sign of the country's moral and civilizational decline.⁴³⁴

After the fall of this order and the rise of communist rule, parts of paternalistic governance and moral dichotomy continued to exist in new ideological forms, paving the way for a new but familiar populist logic. Populist reasoning reemerged decades later during the late socialist era. János Kádár's "goulash communism" was based on welfare paternalism and the promise of protecting the common man from non-elitist extremist ideas.⁴³⁵ This paternalistic style of

⁴³¹ Attila Ágh, *Decline of Democracy in East-Central Europe* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2019).

⁴³² Miklós Zeidler, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920–1945* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2007).

⁴³³ Paul Lendvai, *Orbán: Europe's New Strongman* (London: Hurst, 2021).

⁴³⁴ James M. Skidmore, "Hungarian Historical Memory and the Trianon Trauma," *Central Europe* 16, no. 1 (2018): 41–60.

⁴³⁵ György Schöpflin, *Politics in Hungary* (New York: Longman, 1990).

governing paved the way for later populist political views as a way to protect the people from foreign interference and domestic corruption. After Hungary switched to the democratic system in 1989, its politics became more liberal and democratic. However, the public quickly became disillusioned with party rivalries and elite politics. Economic hardships, privatization, and the social costs of change diminished public trust in the government.

Hungary held its first multi-party general election in 1990 after more than 40 years of single-party rule. Elections have been held every four years since then and have all successfully formed governments. However, this stability has not extended to individual party support. For example, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*, MDF), which won in 1990, declined in 1998, while Fidesz, which started with minimal representation in 1990, became the dominant party in 1998. Similarly, the Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*, MSZP), the successor to the former communist party, has experienced a notable increase in popularity.⁴³⁶

Building on the Socialist Party's growing influence in the late 1990s, the early 2000s saw the emergence of new political strategies aimed at preserving electoral support amid public fatigue with traditional party politics. Ferenc Gyurcsány's government in the early 2000s was socialist, but he also used welfare populism to appeal to people's economic concerns and national pride.⁴³⁷ The 2004 referendum on granting citizenship to ethnic Hungarians abroad⁴³⁸ was an attempt to use redistributive populism to make people feel a sense of belonging to their country. He combined welfare promises with symbolic nationalism.⁴³⁹ While Hungary's post-transformation path initially became liberal democratic in nature, party political disillusionment intensified in the late 2000s. Enyedi states that during this period there emerged a decline in ideological party allegiances as well as an increase in populist sentiments, that made the ground for Orbán's rhetoric fertile enough.⁴⁴⁰ Far from bursting out in 2010, numerous populist trends were already present in political discourse as well as in public discontent before Orbán's comeback into power in 2010.

⁴³⁶ József Mészáros, Norbert Solymosi, and Ferenc Speiser, "Spatial Distribution of Political Parties in Hungary 1990–2006," *Political Geography* 26, no. 7 (2007).

⁴³⁷ András Bozóki, "The Hungarian Patient Revisited," *East European Politics* 31, no. 3 (2015): 273–285.

⁴³⁸ This referendum was initiated by the opposition at that time (Fidesz).

⁴³⁹ Gábor Tóka, "Political Developments in Hungary," *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 3 (2006): 112–126.

⁴⁴⁰ Zsolt Enyedi, "Paternalist Populism and Illiberal Elitism in Central Europe," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21, no. 1 (2016).

To better understand how these core sentiments coalesced into a single political force, it is important to examine Orbán's previous political trajectory and the gradual evolution of his rhetoric. Viktor Orbán's first term as prime minister, from 1998 to 2002, is generally not considered populist. During this period, Orbán used a more liberal-democratic rhetoric along center-right lines. Issues such as European Union integration, the market economy, and close ties with the West were evident. Neither the "people vs. elite" distinction nor typical populist elements such as anti-immigrant sentiment or nationalist agitation were prominent in his rhetoric. The true populist transformation began after Fidesz's defeat in 2002, when Orbán gradually repositioned himself as opposition leader. This process intensified after the 2006 elections, when then-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány admitted to "lying" to his party during the election campaign, leading to a legitimacy crisis that lasted until 2010.⁴⁴¹ During these years, Orbán increasingly developed an anti-elite, nationalist, anti-EU, and anti-immigrant rhetoric. By the time he returned to power in 2010, this populist stance had become Fidesz's core identity. These events demonstrate that populism in Hungary, whether economic or cultural, predates Orbán's "modern populism". Orbán did not introduce the idea of the people as the moral center of politics; that idea was already part of Hungary's political culture.⁴⁴²

To make sense the growing appeal of Orbán's populist rhetoric, the comprehensive political crisis that emerged in Hungary in the late 2000s must be considered. Hungary was in a political crisis long before 2010.⁴⁴³ Public approval of political institutions and parties had sagged considerably in the late 2000s. For example, according to Eurobarometer data in 2009, just 23% of Hungarian respondents had faith in their national parliament, while political parties were trusted by just 19%.⁴⁴⁴ The 2010 elections proved to be critical, and a new environment was created for party politics. The two parties that played a dominant role in the 1990 transition period and have been permanently represented in all parliaments since then, the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége*, SZDSZ) and the moderately conservative MDF, have virtually disappeared. MSZP, which has been the left pole of Hungarian politics since 1990 and won a majority (in coalition with the liberals) for three terms (1994-98, 2002-

⁴⁴¹ For the transcript and political aftermath of the *Őszöd speech* ("we lied" speech) and its impact on Hungary's political polarization, see *The Guardian*, "Hungary PM: We Lied to Win Election," September 18, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/sep/18/1>.

⁴⁴² Ferenc Laczo, "Populism in Power in Hungary: Consolidation and Ongoing Radicalization," *Eurozine*, 2018, <https://www.eurozine.com/populism-power-hungary/>.

⁴⁴³ András Deák, "Hungarian Dances: The Origins and the Future of Viktor Orbán's Revolution," *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 11, no. 1 (2013): 145.

⁴⁴⁴ Pew Research Center, "Hungary Dissatisfied with Democracy, but Not Its Ideals," April 7, 2010, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2010/04/07/hungary-dissatisfied-with-democracy-but-not-its-ideals/>.

10), received a considerably reduced share of the mandates.⁴⁴⁵ However, Jobbik – Movement for a Better Hungary (*Magyarországért Mozgalom*), a radical right-wing party, could take 12.18% of the seats by capitalizing on its combative anti-Gypsy rhetoric. Hungary’s Green Party (LMP – *Lehet Más a Politika*, also known as Politics Can Be Different), a newly formed green liberal party could constitute a small part of it. Considering that the party spectrum has remained virtually unchanged since 2000, these changes demonstrate that Hungarian society has a deep distrust of its own political class. Hence, Orbán’s promise of change for the better and his hope of gaining approval for his anti-liberal turn were well calculated. The crisis of the Republic of 1989⁴⁴⁶ was multifaceted and to some extent repeated some patterns of the past.⁴⁴⁷

This deep political and social fragmentation created fertile ground for populist narratives to take root. Party system fragmentation, together with cultural backlash and economic uncertainty, supported the institutionalization of far-right rhetoric in Hungary. Orbán’s capacity to adjust to these altered sentiments enabled Fidesz to own the narrative space that conventional organizations had neglected.⁴⁴⁸ Körösnéyi noted that Hungary’s post-transition era saw enduring conflicts between democratic institutions and authoritativeness.⁴⁴⁹ Such an environment made it easy for populist forces that were able to ride on popular discontent as well as nationalism sentiments.

Before the 2010 elections, expectations for the Fidesz government were quite different. Memories of the first Orbán government (1998-2002) remained for many as a pro-market, moderately conservative force. Fidesz lost its long-held monopolistic position on the right.⁴⁵⁰ As the 2010s approached, Jobbik’s growing influence was seen in the 2009 European Parliament elections. The party managed to send three representatives to the European Parliament after receiving around 15% of the vote. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, they received 17% of the vote, making them the third strongest party in parliament. MSZP received

⁴⁴⁵ Deák, “Hungarian Dances”, 146.

⁴⁴⁶ It refers to Hungary’s post-communist political system, which faced problems such as public discontent with political elites, economic difficulties, and unmet expectations from the 1989 democratic transition.

⁴⁴⁷ Deák, “Hungarian Dances”, 147.

⁴⁴⁸ Mihai Varga and Aron Buzogány, “The Foreign Policy of Populists in Power: Contesting Liberalism in Poland and Hungary,” *Geopolitics* 26, no. 5 (2021).

⁴⁴⁹ András Körösnéyi, “Government and Politics in Hungary,” in *Government and Politics in Hungary* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), 303.

⁴⁵⁰ Dae Soon Kim, “The Rise of European Right Radicalism: The Case of Jobbik,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49, no. 4 (2016).

the second most votes, less than three percent behind.⁴⁵¹ As 2010 approached, the already disaffected public became reluctant to reform as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. Orbán capitalized on this discontent by presenting himself as the last chance for reform. Fidesz's combination of social paternalism, promises of tax cuts, and pro-market policies strengthened Orbán's electoral position and led him to demand significant reform of the political system.⁴⁵² In order to improve Fidesz's reputation, Orbán hired American strategist Arthur Finkelstein on the same year. Finkelstein suggested that Orbán uses nationalist language to draw on Hungary's history, particularly the Jewish philanthropist George Soros, as a proxy for the harmful effects of globalization. Fidesz easily won the 2010 parliamentary elections thanks to this tactic.⁴⁵³ Unlike the first term of government, when Fidesz was governed on a relatively collective basis, by 2010 Orbán transformed the party into a highly centralized political instrument based on his personal authority and popularity.⁴⁵⁴ The issue of national unity was important for Orbán to respect both foreign and domestic policy. One of the government's first acts was to grant citizenship to all ethnic Hungarians abroad. The issue of Hungarian minorities abroad was a long-standing problem in Hungary's foreign policy and was a legacy of the drama of the Trianon Peace Treaty.⁴⁵⁵ Opposing this, Fidesz revealed that it advocated the extension of citizenship despite the initiative suffering a humiliating defeat in a national referendum in 2004. This step was central to Orbán's nationalist agenda, serving primarily as a symbolic gesture aimed at securing the support of conservatives and maximizing votes, particularly among Hungarians living abroad. This symbolic move, along with other measures such as the designation of the Trianon Day of Mourning, was one of the biggest promises to be fulfilled despite the tensions with neighboring countries.⁴⁵⁶

The issue of Hungarian minorities abroad is a strong concept of Visegrad and regional cooperation, emphasizing respect for national sovereignty and a corresponding focus on the

⁴⁵¹ Zsófia Rakovics and Ildikó Barna, "Jobbik's Journey from Radicalism to Mainstream Politics: Analyzing the Parliamentary Speeches of Jobbik and the Dynamic Network of Its Politicians between 2010 and 2020," *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 10, no. 4 (2024).

⁴⁵² Deák, "Hungarian Dances"; Aron Buzogány, "Illiberal Democracy in Hungary: Authoritarian Diffusion or Domestic Causation?" *Democratization* 24, no. 7 (2017).

⁴⁵³ Bulent Kenes, "Viktor Orbán: Past to Present," *ECPS Leader Profiles* (European Center for Populism Studies), August 2, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.55271/lp0001>.

⁴⁵⁴ Deák, "Hungarian Dances", 153.

⁴⁵⁵ Myra A. Waterbury, "Internal Exclusion, External Inclusion: Diaspora Politics and Party-Building Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary," *East European Politics and Societies* 20, no. 3 (2006).

⁴⁵⁶ Deák, "Hungarian Dances", 153, 154.

concept of a Europe of Nations.⁴⁵⁷ Orbán's political beliefs include a strong national identity as well as concern for Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries.⁴⁵⁸ Fidesz did not have a strong pro-Atlantic sentiment but retained many of the reservations against Russia typical of Eastern European conservative parties.⁴⁵⁹ This was the first Fidesz coalition in which Hungary joined NATO, and the party had historically supported the Western integration process without any reservations. Most of the foreign policy differences in the two-party system of Hungarian politics centered on issues related to Hungarian minorities and thus to neighborly relations.⁴⁶⁰

Viktor Orbán's revolution is often characterized by Western media as a response to the financial crisis.⁴⁶¹ This is partly true; the crisis dealt the final blow to Gyurcsány's Socialist government and made his Party's decline irreversible. After the 2006 elections, the austerity policy lost its meaning; the crisis deprived governments of these advantages. But the relationship between Orbán's policies and the economic crisis is more complex. As in the EU's Southern periphery, the crisis has only magnified existing policy weaknesses and made mismanagement unsustainable.⁴⁶² Change was a necessity for all these countries, and Viktor Orbán regularly speaks of the crisis as a legacy of extraordinary measures.⁴⁶³ His logic is at odds with a declining Europe and the IMF, not only in terms of economic policies but sometimes even in terms of potential political reforms. The crisis has become one of the main narratives of their policies, even though it is clear that economic policy does not have the capacity to deal with its consequences. From this perspective, this is not only a challenge for Hungary, but also an opportunity to legitimize its policies at home and abroad.⁴⁶⁴

Orbán's re-election in 2010 was the precursor for what he later called an "illiberal democracy", which vision he explained most clearly in his 2014 Băile Tuşnad speech. In this speech, he cited Russia, China, and Türkiye as examples of non-liberal countries which had become highly

⁴⁵⁷ Valér Veres, "The Minority Identity and the Idea of the 'Unity' of the Nation: The Case of Hungarian Minorities from Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine," *Identities* 22, no. 1 (2015).

⁴⁵⁸ Szabolcs Pogonyi, "Transborder Kin-Minority as Symbolic Resource in Hungary," *JEMIE* 14 (2015).

⁴⁵⁹ Edit Zgut-Przybylska, "Hungary: The Pro-Russian Far-Right Is Reinforced by the Orbán Regime," in *Russia and the Far-Right: Insights from Ten European Countries*, ed. Kacper Rekawek, 111–144.

⁴⁶⁰ Deák, "Hungarian Dances", 162.

⁴⁶¹ András Tóth, "Coming to the End of the *Via Dolorosa*? The Rise of Selective Economic Nationalism in Hungary," in *Divisive Integration: The Triumph of Failed Ideas in Europe – Revisited* (Brussels: ETUI, 2015).

⁴⁶² András Körösekényi and Veronika Patkós, "Liberal and Illiberal Populism: The Leadership of Berlusconi and Orbán," *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 8, no. 3 (2017).

⁴⁶³ Erik Kirschbaum, "Hungary's Orban Says Crisis May Overstretch Europe's Democracies," *Reuters*, November 20, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/hungary-s-orban-says-crisis-may-overstretch-europe-s-democracies-idUSBRE89A0EA/>.

⁴⁶⁴ Deák, "Hungarian Dances", 167, 168.

competitive at a national level while also enjoying political stability without adhering to Western liberal values.⁴⁶⁵ This statement meant abandoning liberal democratic values in exchange for national conservation, centralized power, and reorienting Hungary's foreign relations. Orbán himself never called for an abandonment of democracy in any form, but for an alternative conception promoting state sovereignty, conserving culture, and authentic national values rather than liberal pluralism. His ideological program was underpinned in turn by an illiberal discourse based upon national sovereignty, Christian nationhood, and a story of national rebirth. This re-orientation resonated among elements of the electorate disillusioned by earlier liberal regimes' inability to perform. Crisis management under the government in this period conformed to the logic of illiberal governance, characterized by tight executive dominance and centralized power.⁴⁶⁶

After 2014, the internal dynamics of Hungarian political life profoundly influenced the populist landscape. While Fidesz consolidated its dominant position, its right-wing rival, Jobbik, undertook a complete overhaul, abandoning radicalism for a more centrist stance in order to gain electoral legitimacy. This strategic repositioning forced Fidesz to adopt a more radical, nationalist, and Euroskeptic approach to maintain its dominance over right-wing voters. Scholars note that since 2010, Fidesz has systematically aligned itself with Jobbik's platform and frequently adopted its themes and rhetoric.⁴⁶⁷ Numerous political examples illustrate this dynamic: the 2010 Citizenship Law granting citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living abroad, the "Opening to the East" foreign policy implemented after 2012, and the strict anti-immigration measures implemented in 2015. The themes initially championed by Jobbik were later adopted by Fidesz, and the belief that "What Jobbik says, Fidesz does" became widespread. The 2015 migration crisis significantly accelerated this convergence, shifting Fidesz's discourse from conservative nationalism to a more radical and exclusionary populism, portraying Brussels and immigrants as existential threats to Hungary's sovereignty and Christian identity. By adopting

⁴⁶⁵ Viktor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Băile Tușnad Summer University and Student Camp," July 26, 2014, <http://2010-2015.miniszterelnok.hu.>; Takis S. Pappas, *Populism and Liberal Democracy: A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).; Matthijs Bogaards, "De-Democratization in Hungary: Diffusely Defective Democracy," *Democratization* 25, no. 8 (2018).; Enyedi, "Paternalist Populism and Illiberal Elitism".

⁴⁶⁶ Norbert Merkovity, Márton Bene, and Xénia Farkas, "Hungary: Illiberal Crisis Management," in *Political Communication and COVID-19*, ed. Darren Lilleker, Ioana A. Coman, Miloš Gregor, and Edoardo Novelli (New York: Routledge, 2021), 275.

⁴⁶⁷ Aron Buzogány and Mihai Varga, "The Ideological Context of Hungary's 'Eastern Opening' Policy: Populism and Economic Nationalism against the West," *East European Politics and Societies* 34, no. 2 (2020): 268–90.; Lane Kim, "From Mainstream to Extreme: Fidesz and the Transformation of the Hungarian Right," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 7 (2016): 1174–91.

Jobbik's previously marginal themes, Fidesz neutralized its national rival and redefined the Hungarian political right as a space characterized by authoritarian and nationalist rhetoric.⁴⁶⁸

To summarize, Viktor Orbán's populism in foreign policy centers on portraying the EU and the IMF as "others" or "enemies". He frames Hungary as the true representative of European values and positions its government as the protector of Christian Europe. He argues that it is Hungary, not Brussels, that defends the fundamental values of Europe and its Christian identity. Therefore, he positions himself as a protector of the Hungarian people against these external forces and builds his populist discourse on this foundation. Although Hungary is a member of both NATO and the EU, its relations with the West are not as smooth as one might expect. During the campaign leading up to the 2019 European Parliament elections, the Orbán government placed large billboards across Hungary depicting EU officials such as Jean-Claude Juncker alongside George Soros and warning citizens that "Brussels wants to settle migrants in Hungary".⁴⁶⁹ This campaign reinforced the idea that external actors were trying to undermine Hungary's sovereignty. Consequently, the Hungarian government's foreign policy rhetoric and decisions were carefully crafted to align with societal attitudes, creating a feedback loop in which populist rhetoric and public perception mutually reinforce each other.⁴⁷⁰

4.1.2. Orbán's Leadership and Policy Making

Orbán entered politics in the late 1980s as a young, radical, anti-communist politician. However, towards the end of the 1990s, he turned away from these radical, anti-religious and liberal principles towards conservative, nationalist, Christian and authoritarian values and principles.⁴⁷¹ Orbán has always tried to articulate principles that would legitimize his policy. His concept of illiberal democracy may be linked to his general criticism of Western civilization. Orbán broke with the modernist, technocratic and sociological language that had dominated Hungarian political discourse since the late communist era he used a vocabulary

⁴⁶⁸ Zsolt Enyedi, "Populist Polarization and Party System Institutionalization: The Role of Party Politics in De-democratization," *Problems of Post-Communism* 63, no. 4 (2016): 210–20.; Róbert Csehi and Edit Zgut-Przybylska, "Countering National-Level Populism with Local Politics? Broadening Participatory Processes in Budapest in Illiberal Hungary," *Problems of Post-Communism* (2025): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2025.2536028>.

⁴⁶⁹ Balázs Hajba, "Hungary's Anti-EU Billboards Feature Juncker and Soros," *Politico*, February 19, 2019; *Reuters*, "Hungary Launches Anti-EU Billboard Campaign Featuring Juncker, Soros," February 19, 2019.

⁴⁷⁰ Enyedi, "Populist Polarization and Party System Institutionalization".

⁴⁷¹ Paul Hockenos, "The Resistible Rise of Viktor Orbán," *Politico*, February 23, 2011, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-resistible-rise-of-viktor-orban/>.

closer to the language of ordinary people.⁴⁷² Orbán represents a self-aware, willing and optimistic attitude. He rejects the defeatist attitude of Hungarian left-liberal politicians, which fosters an inferiority complex regarding the underdeveloped Hungarian political culture towards the West.

After the political turmoil of the late 1980s, the presence of Hungarian communities abroad, nationalist policies, language barriers, and residual historical sensitivities made it difficult for Hungary to re-establish stable bilateral relations with its neighbors. However, Hungary found itself in a more advantageous geopolitical position as Euro-Atlantic organizations such as the EU and NATO grew. Hungary's foreign policy underwent a dramatic change with its entry into NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004, establishing the country as a vital component of the Euro-Atlantic region.⁴⁷³ However, there were some conflicts associated with assimilation into Western frameworks. As Hungary accepted its new position in the EU, Viktor Orbán's leadership became increasingly nationalistic. As Orbán established his grip on power, he took advantage of the changing geopolitical environment to portray Hungary as the protector of its sovereignty and traditional values against external powers, and also as a member of Europe.

Orbán's populism is one of the defining figures of the last thirty years even has been an example to define contemporary right-wing populism in the international relations.⁴⁷⁴ Their changing political orientations align with the spirit of the times, reflecting the general mood of the population and occasionally nudging issues to the surface that would otherwise remain dormant. The socialist governments that split Viktor Orbán's rule between 2002 and 2010 were criticized, often by Orbán himself, on charges of re-establishing a dangerously close relationship with the eastern power⁴⁷⁵, with Hungary positioned among countries with Trans-Atlantic inclinations.

Viktor Orbán's rise as political leader and prime minister in Hungary is closely linked to his success in reshaping both his own party and the entire political spectrum.⁴⁷⁶ After 1994, he

⁴⁷² Zoltán Gábor Szűcs, "A magyar politikai diskurzus változásai 2000 óta," in *Van irány? Trendek a magyar politikában*, ed. Zsolt Boda and András Körösenyi (Budapest: MTA TK PTI – ÚMK, 2012).

⁴⁷³ István Tarrósy and Zoltán Vörös, "Hungary's Pragmatic Foreign Policy in a Post-American World," *Politics in Central Europe* suppl., no. 1 (2020).

⁴⁷⁴ Miklós Hajba, "Orbanization of the Magyar State: Hungary in the Past 30 Years?" in *Transformative Transformation? 30 Years of Change in CEE.*; Martijn Mos and Igor Macedo Piovezan, "Leadership in International Populism: How Viktor Orbán's Hungary Shows the Way," *New Perspectives* 32, no. 4 (2024).

⁴⁷⁵ Andrzej Sadecki, *In a State of Necessity: How Has Orbán Changed Hungary* (Warsaw: OSW Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, 2014).

⁴⁷⁶ Gellért Rajcsányi, "Viktor Orbán's Hungary: Orbanist Politics and Philosophy from a Historical Perspective," in *Political Change, Panorama: Insights into Asian and European Affairs*, ed. Christian Echle, Frederick Kliem, and Megha Sarmah (Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2018).

entered the political vacuum left by the collapse of the center-right MDF through the masterful repositioning of Fidesz from a left-liberal radical youth movement to a national-liberal, moderate right-wing party. By the time of the 1998 elections, Orbán had become the leader of the political right. By winning the election, he was able to form his first cabinet with his right-of-center coalition partners. Since the larger liberal party, the SZDSZ, joined the Horn government⁴⁷⁷ and entered into a permanent political alliance with the Socialist Party, the left/right conflict has become a permanent divisive dimension.⁴⁷⁸ Thus, the liberal center disappeared from Hungarian politics. He managed to unite the entire political right in Hungary. He successfully used his term as prime minister between 1998 and 2002 to strengthen his position as the leader of the right. He gradually weakened his coalition partners, won their constituencies⁴⁷⁹, and either integrated them into Fidesz or pushed them to the margins of politics. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, Fidesz had become a highly centralized and politically fairly homogeneous all-encompassing party. Orbán's "one flag, one camp" strategy contributed to the strong bipolarization of the political spectrum that lasted until 2010.⁴⁸⁰

EU institutions have been critical of Orbán from the start, pointing out the undemocratic nature of his policy changes and accusing him of compromising fundamental principles of the rule of law. The Hungarian prime minister has opposed Brussels' meddling in his internal affairs since his first day in office. He has argued that when his country joined the EU, it did not choose to embrace feudal ties between Brussels and Budapest.⁴⁸¹ Since 2010, Orbán's cabinet has embarked on a sustained fight for freedom against Brussels. In his policy making, foreign policy was rather an extension of domestic policy and diplomacy depended on his domestic policy and vote maximization efforts.⁴⁸²

The first Orbán government did not distinguish itself in this field and gradually entered a relative isolation towards the end of its term. However, Orbán did not use harsh anti-European

⁴⁷⁷ The Horn government was the third government in Hungary after the change of regime, which was formed from a coalition of two parties, the MSZP and the SZDSZ. The coalition had a two-thirds majority in Parliament but voluntarily agreed to amend the two-thirds laws only if there was a consensus with the opposition. The government took the oath of office on July 15, 1994. After their defeat of the 1998 elections, Prime Minister Gyula Horn's term expired on 6 July 1998, and the other cabinet members' 8 July 1998.

⁴⁷⁸ Körösnéyi, "Political Polarization and Its Consequences".

⁴⁷⁹ Zsolt Enyedi, "The Role of Agency in Cleavage Formation," *European Journal of Political Research* 44, no. 5 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2005.00244.x>.

⁴⁸⁰ Körösnéyi, "Political Polarization and Its Consequences", 16.

⁴⁸¹ Bartosz Rydliński, "Viktor Orbán – First among Illiberals? Hungarian and Polish Steps towards Populist Democracy," *Online Journal Modelling the New Europe* 26 (2018).

⁴⁸² Varga and Buzogány, "The Foreign Policy of Populists in Power", 1444.

and anti-Western rhetoric in these years.⁴⁸³ Even though tensions with European institutions—and, to some extent, with the United States—were partly shaped by domestic political factors, Fidesz faced two key challenges. First, it needed to construct a narrative that would justify the abrupt shift in its foreign policy, particularly to its own voters. Second, it had to minimize the impact of Western responses to its policies. The two were sometimes difficult to unite, as Viktor Orbán regularly demonstrated, even in European forums, that he defended Hungary’s sovereignty in a highly confrontational manner.⁴⁸⁴ This strategy proved relatively effective as long as the Hungarian public’s democratic sensitivities and expectations regarding the EU remained low. The population largely viewed the EU not as a union of shared values ensuring democratic and civil rights but rather as a source of economic benefits, most notably subsidies.⁴⁸⁵ Previous governments and the broader political class had also primarily framed their pro-European stance in economic terms. Consequently, the Fidesz government’s official narrative, which portrayed these conflicts as a defense of national interests while dismissing and rejecting criticisms related to democratic shortcomings, was a strategically logical choice.⁴⁸⁶

4.2. Orbán’s Discourses During the Parliamentary Election Periods

Election campaigns in Hungary officially begin 50 days before the election date. Accordingly, the selected time frames for analysis are February 17–April 6, 2018, and February 12–April 3, 2022. This period is chosen because it represents the most strategic and fertile phase for party leaders to maximize their electoral appeal. The speeches delivered during these campaigns are examined through the lens of the populist discourse’s “us” vs. “them” dichotomy, with a particular focus on their political psychological connotations.

Although various government figures, including the foreign minister, the minister of justice, and officials from the prime minister’s office, also deliver speeches during election campaigns, their statements are not considered independent of the party leader in a populist governance structure. Therefore, this study exclusively analyzes Viktor Orbán’s speeches using CDA.

⁴⁸³ Deák, “Hungarian Dances”, 163.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 164.

⁴⁸⁵ Borbála Göncz, “‘I Would Like to See That One Is Able to Say I’m Proud of Being a Citizen of the EU...’: The Way Hungarian People See Europe and the European Union,” *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 3, no. 1 (2012).

⁴⁸⁶ Deák, “Hungarian Dances”, 164.

4.2.1. 2018 Parliamentary Elections

Orbán's rhetoric in the 2018 parliamentary election has been covertly nurtured from historical memory, in this instance, primarily the Treaty of Trianon, which was an ongoing national trauma continuing to condition Hungarian identity and foreign policy narratives. Invoking Trianon, however, mobilized a rich reservoir of collective grievance, deployed as an admonition for perceived current-day challenges to Hungarian sovereignty and cultural continuity.⁴⁸⁷ Reminding Trianon acted not merely as a memory of lost territory in the past, but also as an exemplary of populist ideological tactics through which current-day immigration and EU integration were presented as existential threats.⁴⁸⁸ In this rendering, national existence became everything in terms of election campaign themes, validating Orbán's characterization as savior of Hungary's national interest and identity. Such conscious association of historical trauma and current-day problem-solving facilitated not only to reassert nationalist feeling, yet also to exclude political opposition as enemy forces, either in alliance with external enemies, or as disunited elites.⁴⁸⁹

“Not with the stroke of a pen, as happened one hundred years ago at Trianon; now they want us to voluntarily hand our country over to others, over a period of a few decades. They want us to hand it over to foreigners coming from other continents, who do not speak our language, and who do not respect our culture, our laws or our way of life.”⁴⁹⁰

Orbán's speech at one of his campaign rallies sums up the prevailing mindset of the 2018 parliamentary elections. A close analysis of his speech reveals a clear narrative structure: the identification of an enemy, the definition of a perceived threat, and the presentation of a savior figure. The issue of migration was in the center of Orbán's foreign policy discourse during the 2018 election campaign. Through his rhetoric, he portrayed Brussels as a bureaucratic enemy and presented George Soros as the mastermind behind perceived external threats, positioning them as existential dangers to the Hungarian people. This is consistent with Orbán's wider illiberal shift since 2010, as national sovereignty becomes increasingly defined in terms of

⁴⁸⁷ Michael Toomey, “History, Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's ‘Illiberal Hungary’,” *New Perspectives* 26, no. 1 (2018): 96, 97.; Christian Lamour and Renáta Varga, “The Border as a Resource in Right-Wing Populist Discourse: Viktor Orbán and the Diasporas in a Multi-Scalar Europe,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 35, no. 3 (2020): 335–50.

⁴⁸⁸ Toomey, “History, Nationalism and Democracy”, 102.

⁴⁸⁹ Toomey, “History, Nationalism and Democracy”, 102, 103.

⁴⁹⁰ Viktor Orbán, “This Is Our Country, and We Shall Fight for It to the End,” *The Prime Minister's Office*, 16 March 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/this-is-our-country-and-we-shall-fight-for-it-to-the-end>.

coming under attack from supranational institutions and global elites, enabling him to make outside threats personal for mobilization purposes.⁴⁹¹

“From their point of view, we natives with our own homeland, our own culture and our own religion [...] from the perspective of people like Soros, we are individuals beyond redemption, who cannot be converted. ... We will not stand by idly while people plot to implement the Soros Plan, and if necessary, we shall deploy an increasingly strong legal arsenal.”⁴⁹²

“We are not alone, and we shall fight together to contain and then stop the plan that Soros has put forward in Brussels and in the UN; and if we have enough allies – and we may indeed have enough allies – then I am sure that we will eventually succeed. Go for it Hungary, go for it Hungarians (*Hajrá Magyarország, hajrá magyarok!*)!”⁴⁹³

Orbán effectively mobilized public opinion by highlighting the supposed threat of immigration, appealing to domestic fears, and presenting himself as the logical protector of the nation. As it has been delivered throughout this study, fear plays an important role in political psychology, particularly in populist discourse, as it allows leaders to strengthen their appeal. In this context, Orbán described migration as an “external force”, thus reinforcing the narrative that Hungary is under siege.

“We Hungarians will have a future if we remain Hungarian, if we nurture the Hungarian language, if we protect our Christian and Hungarian culture, and if we preserve our independence and Hungarian freedom.”⁴⁹⁴

“We currently have our independence, but this isn’t like jam: it doesn’t keep on the shelf indefinitely, and it has to be defended from time to time.”⁴⁹⁵

Orbán’s statements strategically intertwine populism and constructivist identity-building, creating a permanent sense of crisis that legitimizes his leadership and justifies Hungary’s conflicted attitude toward the EU. Orbán shapes his narrative within an “us and them”

⁴⁹¹ András Bíró-Nagy, “Illiberal Democracy in Hungary: The Social Background and Practical Steps of Building an Illiberal State,” in *Illiberal Democracies in the EU: The Visegrad Group and the Risk of Disintegration* (2017), 31–44.

⁴⁹² Viktor Orbán, “For Us, It’s “Hungary First”,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 19 February 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/for-us-it-s-hungary-first>.

⁴⁹³ Orbán, ““Hungary First.””

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

framework, in connection with a thin centered populist ideology. In this discourse, Muslim immigrants are presented as the main threat, while the EU and Brussels are held responsible for enabling this danger. By defining these external actors as enemies, he draws a clear distinction between the “pure Hungarian nation” and those perceived to be against its interests. The importance of this rhetoric becomes obvious during election periods, when such discourses serve to mobilize voters through fear and nationalist feelings. By insisting that his supporters resist the urge to leave the country’s fate in the hands of “internationalists”, Orbán strengthens the notion that Hungary’s sovereignty is threatened and further legitimizes his leadership as the sole defender of national identity and security. This strategy is part of an overall European pattern of right-wing populist politicians who have increasingly Europeanized their populism by turning the EU into an emblematic foe, fueling home-grown anti-globalism.⁴⁹⁶

“The danger is being brought down upon us by politicians in Brussels, Berlin and Paris who want Hungary to adopt their policies: the policies that made them immigrant countries and opened the gates to the decline of Christian culture and the spread of Islam.”⁴⁹⁷

The Muslim immigrants that Orbán presents as the real enemy are directly opposed to the values he claims to defend, most importantly his declared role as the last bastion of Christian Europe. Right-wing populist politicians are successful because they can create narratives that highlight the striking contrast between the dangerous “them” and the endangered “us”. In this context, the language of protecting national borders is often used to argue that protection of the in-group is a vital necessity. Focusing on border control is not only a sensible policy proposition, but also an effective rhetorical tool that supports the notion of existential conflict between the country and its alleged adversaries.⁴⁹⁸

This securitizing narrative is further reinforced by historical memory. Orbán frequently invokes the trauma of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon when discussing migration and frames the arrival of Muslim migrants as a potential repetition of past experiences where foreign settlers (Romanians, Ukrainians, Serbs, or Germans) contributed to the disintegration of Hungary’s territorial integrity.⁴⁹⁹ The distinction between Muslim and Ukrainian refugees further

⁴⁹⁶ Rogers Brubaker, “Why Populism?”, *Theory and Society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 357–85.

⁴⁹⁷ Orbán, “‘Hungary First’”.

⁴⁹⁸ Lamour & Varga, “Securitization of Migration and Populist Discourses in Hungary,” *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 4 (2020): 1–12.

⁴⁹⁹ Such historical parallels activate collective fears of “national dissolution”, mirroring the sense of loss embedded in Turkish narratives of the Tanzimat and the Treaty of Sèvres.

highlights this narrative selectivity: Muslim asylum seekers are portrayed as illegal economic migrants from “safe” transit countries like Serbia or Croatia, while Ukrainian refugees are considered legitimate victims of the war and welcomed accordingly. This differentiation aligns with broader securitizing trends in the post-2015 Visegrád countries, where Muslim refugees have become a symbolic representation of the external threat.⁵⁰⁰

“...when we decided to stop migration at Hungary’s southern borders ... we became a target of the hatred of many people and were attacked from Brussels, because we resisted their basic worldview. We rejected claims that there is nothing we can do to protect our culture, and that there are processes which politicians, the country’s leaders, are powerless to respond to... When acts of terrorism were committed in Western Europe, within a week I was already hearing statements from leaders who said that this is the dawn of an era in which we must learn to live with the reality that terrorism is here among us. ... First, we will lose control over our territory; then we will lose control over the composition of our population; then we will lose our cultural identity; then we will lose our security, and terrorism will arrive.”⁵⁰¹

Viktor Orbán has flooded the European media with pithy advertisements depicting Brussels as a “superstate” and denouncing it as a “European Empire”.⁵⁰² His opposition to deeper European integration is evident in his calls to remove the phrase “closer union” from the Treaty on the EU and in his proposed dissolution of the European Parliament, one of the EU’s core institutions. This mindset is in line with the populist narrative that portrays the EU as an undemocratic and corrupt organization incapable of accurately reflecting the wishes of its people.⁵⁰³

“We do not need to fight the anemic little opposition parties, but an international network which is organized into an empire. We are up against media outlets maintained by foreign concerns and domestic oligarchs, professional hired activists, troublemaking

⁵⁰⁰ Lamour and Varga, “Securitization of Migration”.; and Zsuzsanna Végh, “Migration and Refugees in Visegrad Countries,” *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Report*, 2022.

⁵⁰¹ Viktor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Speech at Christian Democrat International’s Conference on Interfaith Dialogue,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 26 February 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-christian-democrat-international-s-conference-on-interfaith-dialogue>.

⁵⁰² Reuters, “No Thanks: Some Europe Newspapers Refuse Political Ads from Hungary’s Orban,” *Reuters*, July 1 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/no-thanks-some-europe-newspapers-refuse-political-ads-hungarys-orban-2021-07-01/>.

⁵⁰³ Robert Csehi and Edit Zgut, “‘We Won’t Let Brussels Dictate Us’: Eurosceptic Populism in Hungary and Poland,” *European Politics and Society* 22, no. 1 (2021).

protest organizers, and a chain of NGOs financed by an international speculator, summed up by and embodied in the name George Soros.”⁵⁰⁴

“Hungary is performing better today because “we have not allowed the freedom of decision-making to be taken away from us. ... if the ones deciding on important national decisions are not us, but Brussels or the IMF, then we will be in trouble.”⁵⁰⁵

CDA highlights that in many cases, what is not said can be as important as the words spoken. Populist politicians often use fear as a covered rhetorical tool to win over voters by arguing that any change in leadership will lead to instability or disaster. From the political psychology perspective, those who are afraid are more likely to prefer to maintain the status quo than to pursue political change.⁵⁰⁶ In this case, Orbán intentionally uses this kind of veiled language to stimulate a sense of unrest in the population and strengthen the idea that his leadership is essential to the stability and security of the country.

In Orbán’s discourse, it is clear that he portrays himself as the savior of the nation. He places immigration at the center of his discourse, framing it as a fundamental threat while presenting himself as the protector of his “nation” against so-called “predators”.

“Migration is a mistake that can only be committed once, and which cannot be corrected; this is the most exciting and at the same time the most alarming thing which will be at stake at the 8 April elections. ... We and I will go to battle with anyone to protect Hungary.”⁵⁰⁷

General or parliamentary elections serve as platforms for making populist critical speeches, especially against external actors such as Brussels. From this perspective, Orbán’s rhetoric during electoral periods is not only a tool for domestic political mobilization but is also closely intertwined with the formulation and execution of foreign policy. Orbán’s perspective on Europe shapes both his foreign policy discourse and his rhetoric during election periods, when

⁵⁰⁴ Orbán, “This is our country...”

⁵⁰⁵ Viktor Orbán, “We Must Not Allow in a Single Migrant,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 6 March 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/we-must-not-allow-in-a-single-migrant>.

⁵⁰⁶ Peter K. Hatemi, Charles R. Baumert, Rose McDermott, Brad Verhulst, and Justin Esarey, “Fear as a Disposition and an Emotional State: A Genetic and Environmental Approach to Out-Group Political Preferences,” *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 2 (2013).; Davide Morisi, Céline Colombo, and Andrea De Angelis, “Who Is Afraid of a Change? Ideological Differences in Support for the Status Quo in Direct Democracy,” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 31, no. 3 (2021).

⁵⁰⁷ Viktor Orbán, “Hungary Is Facing Two Dangers: Migration and the Loss of the Results We Have Already Achieved,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 13 March 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/hungary-is-facing-two-dangers-migration-and-the-loss-of-the-results-we-have-already-achieved>.

he can most effectively mobilize public opinion and gain its support. In essence, anti-European sentiment forms the basis of Orbán's populist foreign policy, which in turn serves as a tool for domestic politics. Opposition to the EU is not limited to criticizing Europe or, more specifically, Brussels; it also plays a strategic role in Orbán's competition with opposition parties, a topic beyond the scope of this study. Opposition candidates are often portrayed as incapable of protecting Hungary's interests against external threats. Orbán's rhetoric aims to influence public sentiment, perceptions, and political orientations during election campaigns by arousing fears.

“Over the last 30 years we have fought many great battles...but our biggest battle is about to begin...there are national and democratic forces on the one side and international, anti-democratic forces on the other. ...Now is not the time for the governing parties to pick a fight with the anemic opposition parties but to protect Hungary from those international interests, like the Soros empire, that work against Hungary's national interests.”⁵⁰⁸

Populist leaders tend to support each other's policies, which reinforce their shared ideological positions. This pattern is also evident in the case of Hungary. Prime Minister Orbán constructs his rhetoric against European leaders who defend the immigration policies, while at the same time developing strong relationships with leaders of other countries who share his anti-immigration stance. Through collaboration with other European nationalist and populist leaders, Orbán contributes to an interlocking web in which the leaders mutually support and legitimize one another's undertakings by referencing each other's foreign allies.⁵⁰⁹

“...The countries of the Visegrád Four are unwavering. The Orthodox world stands firm, and it seems that Croatia has come to its senses. Austria has now turned in the direction of patriotism and Christianity. In Bavaria spiritual and political resistance has developed under the leadership of the CSU⁵¹⁰. Perhaps it is not too late. And we await, we keenly anticipate, the result of the Italian election, and with it the turning-point which will see

⁵⁰⁸ Viktor Orbán, “Our Biggest Battle Is About to Begin,” *The Prime Minister's Office*, 15 March 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/our-biggest-battle-is-about-to-begin>.

⁵⁰⁹ Aron Buzogány and Mihai Varga, “Illiberal Thought Collectives and Policy Networks in Hungary and Poland,” *European Politics and Society* 24, no. 1 (2023).; Andrea L. P. Pirro and Stijn Van Kessel, “United in Opposition? The Populist Radical Right's EU-Pessimism in Times of Crisis,” *Journal of European Integration* 39, no. 4 (2017).

⁵¹⁰The Christian Social Union in Bavaria is a Christian democratic and conservative political party in Germany.

the return to government of common sense, Italian national and cultural identity – and Silvio Berlusconi. Forza Italia!”⁵¹¹

In general, the 2018 election campaigns were conducted within a securitization framework from an international relations perspective, and Orbán’s rhetoric was shaped accordingly. Security is a sensitive issue for citizens, and when faced with the idea that only the current strong government can protect them from the “evil other”, they are hesitant to vote for change. This reinforces a clear “us vs. them” dynamic in which Hungarians are positioned against external threats. As Barry Buzan argues, securitization occurs when political elites construct certain issues as existential threats through discursive acts that legitimize extraordinary measures.⁵¹² Although Orbán uses securitizing language in his rhetoric, his campaign strategy primarily frames the election as a battle between “us” and “them”. Therefore, a populist discourse, rather than securitization, provides a more effective analytical framework for understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying the election discourse.

4.2.2. 2022 Parliamentary Elections

Orbán’s rhetoric in the 2022 parliamentary election was significantly influenced by two large-scale external developments: the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, and the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Both influenced public rhetoric, reframing voter concerns surrounding security, sovereignty, and financial stability. Orbán used the events to position the election as an existential one for either peace, symbolized by his governance, or instability, which is tied to the opposition.⁵¹³

“There has never been a higher-stakes election in Hungary, at least in the last thirty years, since I have been observing elections. Elections have always been important, but deciding on issues like being dragged into a war or facing an energy embargo that threatens a total economic shutdown is unprecedented. So, we really need to pull ourselves together. I urge every listener to grasp the seriousness of the situation,

⁵¹¹ Viktor Orbán, “Viktor Orbán’s ‘State of the Nation’ Address,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 19 February 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-state-of-the-nation-address>.

⁵¹² Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*.

⁵¹³ Kim Lane Scheppele, “How Viktor Orbán Wins,” *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 3 (2022): 45–61.; Simon Bradford and F. J. Cullen, “The Advantages of Chaos: Myth-Making and COVID-19 in Hungary,” *Populism* 5, no. 2 (2022): 157–83.

recognize the horrors and atrocities of war, understand the consequences threatening Hungary, stand up for our country, protect Hungary, and vote for peace.”⁵¹⁴

This election period was based on the newly erupted Russia-Ukraine war, and fight against the communist threat. Orbán draw himself again as the savior of the nation as long as him and his party are in the power. Not only through the speeches but also through the emails were sent by the Government Information Center (*Kormányzati Tájékoztatási Központ*), he delivered his comfort messages to the people who live in Hungary.

“We play with open cards, and we have never hidden the fact that we see Brussels” strategy as flawed and consider sanctions against Russia to be a dead end. I am convinced that without economic cooperation with Russia, Europe will remain anemic and lethargic. ... For the fourth time since 2010, they want to sell us the tale of a changed and renewed, united and reorganized left. I am sure that the stomachs of Hungarians will not take this even for the fourth time. I confess, I hope that no matter how tenacious the class-fighting communists are, no matter how advanced their clone technology is, if we defeat them now, they won’t be able to produce enough MiniFeri⁵¹⁵ to be able to step into the barrier once again.”⁵¹⁶

A similar pattern was observed in the 2022 election period, when the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war posed a threat of a new wave of migration in neighboring countries. During this period, Prime Minister Orbán took a different stance towards Ukrainian refugees seeking asylum in Hungary. He took pride in allowing all Ukrainian refugees to enter the country and seek asylum. This approach fits with Orbán’s broader narrative of Hungary as the last Christian stronghold in Europe. While consistently opposing the entry of non-Christian refugees, he openly welcomed Christian refugees fleeing the war. His distinction among Ukrainian refugees and previously, primarily Muslim migrants demonstrate selective humanitarian rhetoric featured in populist strategy. While Orbán explained this distinction in terms of simplistic

⁵¹⁴ Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor interjúja a Kossuth Rádió ‘Jó reggelt, Magyarország!’ című műsorában,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 1 April 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-interjuja-a-kossuth-radio-jo-reggelt-magyarorszag-cimu-musoraban-20220401>.

⁵¹⁵ Gyurcsány Show, also known as Mini Feri, videos, the essence of which is to set up Péter Márki-Zay as Ferenc Gyurcsány’s puppet. <https://index.hu/belfold/2023/08/11/gyurcsany-ferenc-filep-david-megafon-kormany-media-hirdetes/> The posters depict Ferenc Gyurcsány and Péter Márki-Zay together, the left’s joint prime ministerial candidate is referred to as “mini Feri”, and the appearance of the two left-wing politicians is reminiscent of the main villains of the popular Austin Powers films. <https://mindenszo.hu/mini-feri-fetrengve-rohog-egesz-magyarorszag-maki-zajon-megjelentek-rola-a-legjobb-plakatok-orszagszerte/>

⁵¹⁶ Viktor Orbán, “Viktor évértékelő beszéde,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 12 February 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-evvertekelo-beszede-20220212>.

geography and culture, so too does it demonstrate underlying ethno-nationalist undertows in his political agendas. In prioritizing Hungary as such a neighborhood and protector only for Christian asylum seekers, he reaffirmed an argument strongly tying national identification to corpuscular religiosity and homogeneity.⁵¹⁷ This perspective can be critically examined from a humanitarian perspective and within the framework of international law. However, since this study does not focus on these aspects, this issue is left open to readers' interpretation and further academic research.

“We let everyone in. I have also seen people who do not have travel documents, we also provide them with travel documents, and we also allow people from third countries to enter after the appropriate screenings. ... Whoever enters the territory of Hungary comes under Hungarian jurisdiction, we act according to Hungarian legislation. That's why we will help everyone.”⁵¹⁸

“You don't even have to be a nuclear scientist to distinguish between the influx of masses coming from distant Muslim worlds towards Europe in hopes of a better life and helping Ukrainians fleeing to Hungary because of the Ukrainian Russian war. So, anyone who doesn't see this difference, I think, doesn't see anything about international politics. So those who come from far away come through quite a few safe third countries, they have to be cared for there and they have to be helped there. But where should poor Ukrainians go? Well, we are their neighbors! So, in this case, the rule is that all refugees who come from the neighborhood must be helped, because there is a war there. ... This is an elementary, human, Christian life instinct. And we act accordingly, those who come from Ukraine can be sure that they will be welcomed here by friends. Hungary is a friend of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people ... we will give them all the help we can.”⁵¹⁹

During the 2022 elections, the “we” in Orbán's rhetoric referred to Christians, while “they” were non-Christians. However, the opposition, often labeled as “the left” by Orbán, was not associated with non-Christians but was portrayed as a group that disregarded the interests and

⁵¹⁷ Thomas B. Pepinsky, Ádám Reiff, and Krisztina Szabo, “The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis and the Politics of Public Opinion: Evidence from Hungary,” *Perspectives on Politics* 22, no. 4 (2024): 992.

⁵¹⁸ Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor sajtónyilatkozata a magyar–ukrán határ szemlét követően,” *The Prime Minister's Office*, 26 February 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-sajtonyilatkozata-a-magyarukran-hatar-szemlejet-kovetoen>.

⁵¹⁹ Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor exkluzív interjúja a M1-nek,” *The Prime Minister's Office*, 27 February 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-exkluziv-interjuja-a-m1-nek>.

security of Hungary and its people. Apart from that, all foreign policy decisions taken by the Prime Minister were justified as being in the best interest of the nation.

“...if a decision has to be made, which decision is the one that best serves Hungarian interests, because Hungary’s interests come first, Hungary before everything, so what decisions should we make in order to be able to stay out of this conflict and not be nor sanctions, as a result of which, in the end, even if we stay out of the war, they will pay the price with us.”⁵²⁰

“...it is not allowed that the aspects of the campaign come before the national interests. Even one bad sentence can cause trouble. In a war situation, speech is half an action. The opposition wants to send weapons that will be used to shoot at the Russians, or soldiers that will fight against the Russians. This proves that they have no routine, no knowledge and no sense of responsibility. With their irresponsible statements, they only add fuel to the fire, and this is against the interests of Hungary. Instead of adventure politics, responsible politics, security and stability are needed.”⁵²¹

Orbán has also addressed foreign policy decisions, particularly in the economic sphere, based on his rhetoric surrounding the Russo-Ukrainian war. Despite facing criticism for democratic backsliding and Hungary’s deteriorating international reputation, securing financial liquidity has remained a major challenge for the Fidesz leadership. Ironically, Orbán has fallen victim to his own rhetoric, as institutions previously blamed for Hungary’s economic difficulties, such as the IMF, have become inaccessible as potential financial partners. In response, the government has launched its “Eastern Winds” campaign, aimed at attracting investment and securing loans from non-Western countries. Although similar economic outreach had been pursued under previous Socialist governments, it lacked a Euroskeptic framework and was not directly linked to debt management. Orbán’s diplomatic and financial opening to Eastern partners, colloquially referred to as Hungary’s “Opening to the East” strategy, became politicized in terms of an articulation of opposition to Western centrism in international relations. Domestically, however, the strategy was articulated as pragmatic adjustment to declining Western hegemony and increasing multipolarity, thereby justifying Hungary’s strategic collaboration with non-Western actors like China, Russia and Türkiye. This initiative was also controversial at home and abroad

⁵²⁰ Orbán, “Exclusive interview with M1.”

⁵²¹ Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor interjúja a Mandiner hetilapnak,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 3 March 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-interjuja-a-mandiner-hetilapnak>.

for making Hungary increasingly dependent politically and economically on authoritarian regimes.⁵²² Orbán integrated this strategy with broader narratives about the “decline of the West” the “crisis of capitalist consumer societies” and the need to forge new global partnerships. This was also a relatively large reversal in some specific cases, such as China, where Fidesz had been one of the most relentless supporters of the “free Tibet” policy until 2009. While Russia was clearly involved in this policy, relations with other potential creditors from the Gulf and the Far East appeared to have intensified.⁵²³

“There is a change of position at the top of the world. As things stand today, China will soon become the world’s most powerful economic and military power. America is in decline, while China is getting stronger. Hungary, with a population of ten million, has to maneuver skillfully in such a period. We are in alliance with the West, but we also want to establish a beneficial relationship with the emerging new great power. This is a complicated task bordering on art for policy makers.”⁵²⁴

“There are two such markets: one is the Balkans, and the other is China. We need to target these areas. Let’s not forget that our trade turnover with the states to the east of us increased by 28 percent in ten years, and the investment volume from the eastern countries reached 60 percent. Right, the largest Hungarian capital investment is also in South Korea, these three billion, and what is being prepared also comes from the East, not only by coming from there, but also by buying the Western ones...”⁵²⁵

This makes it clear that decisions about foreign policy and economic policy are closely linked. A government’s ability to stimulate the economy can have a major impact on voter behavior, as economic stability and growth often result in increased electoral support. In this case, gaining funds and investment through foreign policy efforts benefits the economy and increases the political legitimacy and voter appeal of the ruling party.

Orbán aimed to rally the people around the flag by portraying the election as a matter of national existence. His implicit message was that the country would face existential dangers if the

⁵²² István Tarrósy, Hajer Trabelsi, and Zoltán Vörös, “Hungary’s Relations with the BRICS in the Context of the Changing World Order,” *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2024): 63-65.

⁵²³ Deák, “Hungarian Dances”, 166.

⁵²⁴ Orbán, “Mandiner interview.”

⁵²⁵ Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor beszéde a MAGOSZ–NAK gazdakongresszusán,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 5 March 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszede-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-beszede-a-magyar-gazdakorok-es-gazdaszovetkezetek-szovetsege-magosz-es-a-nemzeti-agrargazdasagi-kamara-nak-gazdakongresszusan>.

current government were not supported. This discourse is compatible with a constructivist perspective because it fosters national identity and public opinion. From a political psychological perspective, it also shows how populist politicians continue to win elections despite serious criticism from the international community. By creating a sense of urgency and fear, they secure continued support and increase voter loyalty.

“Normally, an election should only be about good governance, yet we see it as a matter of national existence, as there is a danger that another generation of communists will return.”⁵²⁶

“...there will be an election, it will give us all a task, but it will be a special election, an election determined by the mood of the war going on next door, where enthusiasm is important, but common sense is perhaps even more important, which, however, this war has direct effects on your lives, and this requires that the government can devote only a part of its forces to the campaign, and to ward off these bad effects, we must devote most of the government’s strength and energy, even during the most intense period of the campaign.”⁵²⁷

Communism has also played a major role in Viktor Orbán’s election campaign. He framed Brussels as the “dangerous other”, portraying it as a force trying to restore leftist power in Hungary and drag the country back to the “dark age” before Fidesz. Populist leaders use historical fears to manipulate voters more effectively by evoking past national traumas.⁵²⁸ The greater the fear of a return to a period of perceived instability, the stronger the inclination to maintain the status quo. In this narrative, the left is equated with the “other” and is portrayed as controlled and directed by foreign powers. Orbán’s anti-communist rhetoric in the 2022 election is an influential form of framing in history, correlating current left-wing opposition to Hungary’s repressive communist history. In countries with recent authoritarian experiences, such rhetorical tactics prove extremely potent, as they invoke collective trauma and memory to

⁵²⁶ Orbán, “Mandiner interview.”

⁵²⁷ Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde az 1848/49. évi forradalom és szabadságharc 174. évfordulóján,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 15 March 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszede-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-184849-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-174-evfordulojan>.

⁵²⁸ Deniz Ülke Arıboğan, *Travmaların Gölgesinde Politik Psikoloji* (İstanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 2020).

secure right-wing political support. Framing current political rivals as followers of communist ideas, Orbán manages to polarize the public along historical and ideological dimensions.⁵²⁹

“...we will not let them drag our country back into the left-wing nightmare from which we rescued it twelve years ago. We sent a message: we will not allow Hungary to go bankrupt again. ... We sent the message that we here on the right are not pious losers who are afraid of the influential international media behind the left, the bureaucrats in Brussels or the rich George Soros. We said we would fight.”⁵³⁰

At the same time, Orbán conveyed the covered message that voting for the opposition would ultimately result in Hungary being drawn into the conflict, by pointing out that left-wing parties were planning to disrupt the country’s peace by making decisions that could lead to war. This veiled threat also consolidated his strategy of portraying himself as Hungary’s one protector of national stability and security and further mobilized citizens through threat-driven rhetoric. From a political psychology standpoint, Orbán’s rhetoric successfully exploits citizens’ greater sensitivity toward threat, particularly during periods of uncertainty. It has been demonstrated through this research that perceived threat increases citizens’ openness to security-prioritizing messages and an appetite for firm, protective governance. Such mobilization at the psychological level maximizes political loyalty and reinforces cohesion, most strongly among risk-averse citizens in periods of crisis.⁵³¹

“The left has lost its sanity and would lurch madly into a cruel, protracted and bloody war. The left wants to send Hungarian soldiers and Hungarian weapons to the front line. We will not allow this. We will not let the left drag Hungary into this war! We will not let the left turn Hungary into a military target, make Hungarians here and in Transcarpathia a target! We Hungarians know very well who used to pocket the profits

⁵²⁹ Nicholas Hernandez and Thomas Campbell, *Populism, Trauma, and Memory: Understanding Orbán’s Use of History to Solidify Political Control*, CEU DI Working Papers 2023/18 (Budapest: Central European University, 2023), 5-8, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4602024>.; Péter Krekó and Zsolt Enyedi, “Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán’s Laboratory of Illiberalism,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): 41-43, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0043>.

⁵³⁰ Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde az 1848/49. évi forradalom és szabadságharc 174. évfordulóján,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 15 March 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-184849-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-174-evfordulojan>.

⁵³¹ Hatemi et al., “Fear as a Disposition”, 281-284.

of such wars. We are strong enough to resist the plans of the left and the warmongers behind them.”⁵³²

“People want peace, the national side is the guarantee of peace, I think the left poses a risk to our peace and security, and this is such a powerful issue that it has pushed everything else into the background.”⁵³³

Orbán’s message is very important to the Hungarian people. It gives them a sense of security because it comes from a leader who has been already in power for many years, and people have already witnessed how they are governed. By expressing his belief that “as long as we are here, you will remain peaceful”, Orbán strengthens his reputation as a stabilizing influence and appeals to the people’s need for continuity and security.

“We have come a long way, and a lot of people have joined us, the country stands by us. We must and will win this election. We will win, and then there will be peace, security and tranquility in Hungary. Today we kept the advice, now we turn into the finish line. ... So, let’s go and win the most important battle of our lives! Let’s give them what they deserve and protect Hungary! We Hungarians are together, not for anyone else, but for each other.”⁵³⁴

4.3. Analysis of Viktor Orbán’s Election Discourses

When Fidesz occupied the xenophobic nationalist right position, Jobbik presented an increasingly centrist vision.⁵³⁵ When party leader Gábor Vona reacted to Orbán’s Fidesz embracing xenophobic rhetoric, Jobbik moved away from racist rhetoric in a top-down process. Fidesz’s rhetoric was visible throughout the country during elections in spring 2018. Billboards were filled with government-sponsored ads against immigration with a simple message: STOP. One of the distrusted figures was the Jewish-Hungarian millionaire George Soros: Othering meaning-making constituted the national us, unlike the Soros army or team.⁵³⁶

⁵³² Orbán, “March 15 commemorative speech.”

⁵³³ Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor interjúja a Kossuth Rádió ‘Jó reggelt, Magyarország!’ című műsorában,” *The Prime Minister’s Office*, 1 April 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-interjuja-a-kossuth-radio-jo-reggelt-magyarorszag-cimu-musoraban-20220401>.

⁵³⁴ Orbán, “March 15 commemorative speech.”

⁵³⁵ Anniina Hyttinen and Lena Näre, “Symbolic and Ritual Enactments of Nationalism: A Visual Study of Jobbik’s Gatherings during Hungarian National Day Commemorations,” *Visual Studies* 32, no. 3 (2017): 236–50.

⁵³⁶ Emilia Palonen, “Performing the Nation: The Janus-Faced Populist Foundations of Illiberalism in Hungary,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 26, no. 3 (2018): 317.

Orbán consistently frames his discourse around a classic populist dichotomy: “we” (the Hungarian people) and “them” (external powers such as Brussels, George Soros, and international organizations). This dichotomy serves to unite people against a common enemy, to strengthen a collective identity based on Hungarian nationalism and Christian values that follow the constructivist mindset of identity building. This constructivist stress highlights in which ways Orbán actively constructs non-static but mobilizable identity boundaries in political moments of need, reaffirming the notion of identity as a politically instrumental and socially constructed category.⁵³⁷ On the other hand, immigration is presented as an existential threat not only to Hungary’s cultural identity but also to its security and economic stability. By framing immigration, Orbán positions himself as the savior of the nation, the man who can defend Hungary from the chaos due to the weak immigration policies of Western Europe.

Orbán’s speeches are not just about local politics; they also influence Hungary’s position in international affairs. He claims that Hungary’s elections have a direct impact on European politics, especially on issues like migrant resettlement quotas. In line with the neorealist perspective, by signaling that his own identity will influence European Council decisions, he links domestic political choices to broader European outcomes, thus extending the influence of Hungarian domestic politics to the European arena. Orbán’s populist rhetoric demonstrates how securitizing language can translate into a broader political performance that blurs the line between discourse and governance. The “Stop Soros” legislative package and nationwide “national consultations” demonstrate how discursive marginalization and fear-based appeals are institutionalized into legal and communicative practices designed to perpetuate the populist narrative about the external threat.⁵³⁸ These initiatives demonstrate that the power of populist rhetoric lies not in the policies themselves, but in the performative reinforcement of the “people-elite” divide. Through state-sponsored polls, opinion polls, and billboard campaigns, the government has constantly evaluated and adapted its rhetoric to the emotional climate of the electorate; has transformed populist discourse into a dynamic feedback loop between leadership and public sentiment.⁵³⁹ The legal debates surrounding the Stop Soros law and the European

⁵³⁷ Gábor Illés, András Körösenyi, and Rudolf Metz, “Broadening the Limits of Reconstructive Leadership: Constructivist Elements of Viktor Orbán’s Regime-Building Politics,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2018): 802.

⁵³⁸ Marton Dunai, “Hungary Approves ‘STOP Soros’ Law, Defying EU, Rights Groups,” *Reuters*, 20 June 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/hungary-approves-stop-soros-law-defying-eu-rights-groups-idUSKBN1JG1V0/>.

⁵³⁹ Mráz, Ágoston Sámuel. “Adatok és közlemények: A közvélemény-kutatások szerepe a 2022-es választási kampányban.” *Századvég* 2022, no. 2–3.

Court of Justice's ruling against it⁵⁴⁰ reveal that populist discourse in Hungary not only shapes political action but also redefines the boundaries of legitimate speech and policy within a contested European normative framework.

Orbán often uses fear as a psychological tool to gain public support and mobilize them. In his speeches, he refers to the dangers of losing Hungarian culture, weakening national sovereignty, and facing economic collapse. He blames these threats on foreign influences and their local supporters. By portraying immigrants as a threat to Hungarian culture and security, Orbán is triggering concerns about the survival of Hungarian identity. It serves not only to rally his political support but also to the justification of growing authoritarian policies under the excuse of national security. Orbán's rhetoric portrays Hungary as constantly under threat from both internal and external enemies. It causes a siege mentality among the electorate and justifies the need for a strong leader. The psychological effects of this discourse extend beyond Hungary and shape how other nations perceive and interact with Hungary on the international stage. This fits with political psychology research that long-term exposure to perceived threat produces siege mentality, with increased in-group solidarity, suspicion of out-groups, and acceptance of authoritarian leadership.⁵⁴¹

Ahead of the 2022 elections, Orbán has frequently criticized international organizations such as the EU and the IMF from a neoclassical realist perspective. This captures neoclassical realism's assertion that domestic political actors process international structural pressures through notions of national interest and ideological objectives, applying foreign policy as an instrument to further internal political consolidation.⁵⁴² In his statements, he described these international organizations as disconnected from Hungary's interests and values. For example, he defined Brussels' sanctions against Russia and its migration policies as harmful to Hungary. Orbán emphasizes that Hungary should rely on its own resources rather than seek aid from the EU or other international institutions. He voices this view while criticizing the EU's response to the energy crisis and argues that Hungary should solve its problems on its own.

https://szazadvegfolyoirat.hu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Szazadveg_2022_02_03_Adatok-es-kozlemlenyek-a-kozvelemeny-kutatasok-szerepe-a-2022-es-valasztasi-kampanyban.pdf

⁵⁴⁰ "Top EU Court Hits Hungary over 'Stop Soros' Migrant Law," *Al Jazeera*, 16 November 2021,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/16/top-eu-court-hits-hungary-over-stop-soros-migrant-law>

⁵⁴¹ Daniel Bar-Tal, "From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis," *Political Psychology* 21, no. 2 (2000): 352-54.

⁵⁴² Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*.

It should also be noted that, despite portraying Hungary as a Christian fortress in Europe, Orbán's foreign policy is pragmatically influenced by Turanism⁵⁴³, which transcends religious boundaries. Hungary has announced its intention to strengthen connections with Turkic countries, regardless of religious affiliation, by establishing an Organization of Turkic States (OTS) Representative Office in Budapest, along with increased diplomatic relations.⁵⁴⁴ This practical strategy demonstrates Orbán's capacity to combine strategic foreign policy goals with nationalist rhetoric and aligns Hungary with both non-European and Euro-Atlantic countries.

Orbán portrays left-wing parties as being in the same league as foreign powers and refers to them as a threat to national unity and security. His rhetoric often refers to shared national values and identity, positioning Fidesz as the party that will protect Hungary's peace, security, and Christian heritage. He separates Hungarians from perceived enemies by making a clear distinction between "us and them". He portrays the Hungarian left as a force that is in conflict with national interests by collaborating with foreign powers and claims that they will drag Hungary into dangerous conflicts. Conversely, he describes himself and Fidesz as a force that protects Hungarian sovereignty and stability against these internal and external threats. Orbán's approach of refugees from Ukraine is more selective and divisive towards refugees from Muslim-majority countries. His attitude towards Ukrainian refugees includes the use of discourse that prioritizes Hungary's national interests and values, unlike other groups. Overall, Orbán's discourses reflect a complex interplay of populist appeals, nationalist rhetoric, and strategic maneuvers in international relations.

Orbán's rhetoric shows how populist rhetoric shapes not only domestic politics but also international policies and alliances. His speeches reveal the effects of populist rhetoric that goes beyond national borders by manipulating local perceptions and aligning them with broader global strategies. In this regard, it demonstrates how the populist discourse used in domestic politics can affect global politics and thereby interactions between states.

⁵⁴³ Hungarian Turanism is a diverse Turanist phenomenon that revolves around identifying or associating Hungarian history and people with the history and people of Central Asia, Inner Asia, or the Ural region. It encompasses many different understandings and has served as a guiding principle for many political movements. It was at its most vibrant in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

⁵⁴⁴ Zoltan Egeresi, "Azerbaijan and the Turkic World," *Foreign Policy Review* 16, no. 2 (2023): 69.

Table 2. Summary of Viktor Orbán’s Election Discourses

Year	Highlighted External Threats	Internal Opponents	Dominant Themes	Populist Frame (Us vs Them)	Heroic Self-Portrayal	Strategic Foreign Policy Narrative	Analyzed number of speeches (FP + U/T Dichotomy)
2018	Brussels George Soros, Immigrants	Left-wing parties	Immigration, Christian identity, Security	Hungarians vs Globalists/Brussels	National protector	Opposition to EU integration; illiberal nationalism	41 (Example: Speeches focusing on external threats)
2022	Brussels Ukraine War, Communism	United opposition	Peace vs War, Sovereignty, Security	Christians vs Communists/Interventionists	Only alternative to chaos	Strategic neutrality, Eastern opening, economic autonomy	30 (Example: Speeches focusing on external threats)

Source: Author’s own editing

CHAPTER 5. TURKISH CASE

5.1. Rising Right-wing Populism in Türkiye

5.1.1. Historical Background

In Turkish, populism appears in two forms: “peopleism (*halkçılık*)” and “populism (*popülizm*)”.⁵⁴⁵ The former played a central role in the intellectual discourse of the Second Constitutional Era⁵⁴⁶ and the single-party period⁵⁴⁷ (1923-46). In Turkish literature, it has a largely positive connotation, with the emphasis on the education and enlightenment of the people as primary goals. On the other hand, the second form carries negative connotations and expresses opposition to the “Western-liberal democratic system”.⁵⁴⁸ Populism, one of the fundamental principles and six pillars of the Kemalist ideology⁵⁴⁹, was officially incorporated into the Turkish constitution in 1937. However, its roots date back to the Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire. The intellectuals of that period, Yusuf Akçura⁵⁵⁰, Ahmet Ağaoğlu⁵⁵¹ and Hüseyinzade Ali⁵⁵², shaped Turkish populism under the influence of the Russian Narodniki, but the interpretations of this concept changed during and after the single-party period. Despite the widespread idea that Turkish populism is a flexible and unchangeable concept, it has been constantly renewed, adapting to and reflecting the economic and social conditions of the relevant periods.

The lack of consensus in the literature on the concept of populism leads to the perception that any political idea that emphasizes public participation is labeled as populism. This blurs the distinction between populism, which can be both inclusive and exclusive, claiming to be the “sole representative of the people” or even “the people themselves”, and “peopleists”

⁵⁴⁵ Furkan Cay and Murat Deregözü, “From the Late Ottoman Empire to the Single-Party Era: The Changing Traits of Premature Turkish Populism,” *Vezetéstudomány – Budapest Management Review* 53, no. 5 (2022): 96–104.

⁵⁴⁶ The period of restored parliamentary rule in the Ottoman Empire between the 1908 Young Turk Revolution and the 1920 dissolution of the General Assembly, during the empire’s twilight years.

⁵⁴⁷ The single-party period in Türkiye began with the declaration of the republic on October 29, 1923. Except for short intervals, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) was the only legal political party between 1923 and 1945, until the National Development Party (MKP) was founded.

⁵⁴⁸ Toygar Sinan Baykan, “Halkçılık ve Popülizm: Türkiye Vakası ve Bir Kavramın Kullanımları,” *Mülkiye Dergisi* 41, no. 1 (2017).

⁵⁴⁹ Kemalism or Atatürkism is a political ideology based on the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Republic of Türkiye.

⁵⁵⁰ He was one of the leading representatives of the Turkism movement. He is a Tatar Turk.

⁵⁵¹ Azerbaijani-born Turkish politician, lawyer, writer and journalist. He was the founder of liberal Kemalism.

⁵⁵² He was one of the pioneer intellectuals of Turkism and Turanism. His views were influential in his homeland Azerbaijan, Türkiye and other Turkish societies. He is the person who instilled the idea of Turkism in Ziya Gökalp.

(*halkçılar*), who prioritize the people's interests in their politics and seek a transformation in favor of the people. Furthermore, despite the possibility that the two terms are coded separately in Turkish, the distinction between the two concepts is reduced when translation problems arise due to the use of the same English term for both. Those who experienced this confusion in Türkiye were the *peopleists*, who emerged after the Second Constitutional Era and developed their ideas during the Republican period. Despite numerous institutional, conceptual, instrumental, and goal-oriented differences from populists, Ottoman-Turkish *peopleists* were erroneously labeled as populists by ignoring these distinctions.⁵⁵³

At this point, it is worth to explain the founder leader of Republic of Türkiye, Mustafa⁵⁵⁴ Kemal Atatürk's populism. One of the principles of Atatürk is populism and it comprehends a different understanding what has been standing after his decease and until today. The distinction between populism and Atatürk's populism is related to the scope of the definition of people or nation. Indeed, the definition of Turkishness in Article 88 of the 1924 Constitution⁵⁵⁵ was shaped around this comprehensiveness and accepted all of the people of Türkiye as Turks regardless of their religion and race. Because Atatürk and the founding cadre were afraid not only of class separation but also of any ethnic or religious social separation that would lead to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Tracks of this can be seen in the route Atatürk drew for the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) at the 1935 Congress: "*The fundamental idea and desire of the Republican People's Party is to protect citizens from all kinds of differences and to make them useful to themselves and the great Turkish nation.*"⁵⁵⁶

Another distinction between Atatürk's understanding of populism can be resonated to the Laclauian approach. Accordingly, populism, which turns politics into a scene of conflict, aims to mobilize those who suffer from social exclusion by destroying the status quo. According to this, the aim of this mobilization is to achieve radical democracy. Because, according to the Laclauian approach, liberal democracy, which is inherently exclusionary, is the problem

⁵⁵³ Onur Alp Yılmaz, "Atatürk'ün Halkçılık İlkesi Üzerine Bir Tartışma: Halkçılık mı Popülizm mi?," *Memleket Siyaset Yönetim* 17, no. 37 (2022): 143–72.

⁵⁵⁴ The name Mustafa was not written on the two identity cards issued in 1934 and 1935 (Adoption of the Surname Law No. 2525 dated 21 June 1934).

⁵⁵⁵ It was the constitution of the Republic of Türkiye, which was accepted on April 20, 1924, and came into force on May 25, 1924, replacing the 1921 Constitution. It remained in force until 1961 with several important changes, such as the addition of the six principles, also known as Atatürk's principles, the removal of the statement that the state's religion was Islam and granting women the right to elect and be elected as deputies.

⁵⁵⁶ Republican People's Party, *Speech of the General Chairman Kamal Atatürk at the Fourth Grand Congress of the CHP* (Ankara: Republican People's Party, 1935).

itself.⁵⁵⁷ However, Atatürk’s ultimate understanding is to achieve inclusive liberal democracy with a definition of charity that is inclusive, not exclusive. The legacy of Ziya Gökalp⁵⁵⁸ is the idea that a liberal democracy based on division of labor can be established, with no losers.

Finally, the role that Atatürk gave to the intellectuals is also noteworthy. Because populists code their positions in favor of the people by establishing a contrast between “corrupt elites” and “pure, clean and naive people”.⁵⁵⁹ In this conflict, although it is unclear who the two concepts cover, that is, even if they are “empty signifiers”, since it is based on the logic of “exposing the elites”, opposition intellectuals and economic elites are usually the targets depending on which ideology populism is affiliated with. Accordingly, the “elites”, whose identity is never fully understood and who are claimed to be against the will of the people, are depicted as a homogeneous group.⁵⁶⁰ However, while Atatürk undertakes a transformative role in society, he positions himself on the side of the intellectuals, not the people.⁵⁶¹

Populism during the single-party system in Türkiye was primarily an elitist, hierarchical, bureaucratic, anti-liberal and anti-democratic discourse. The slogan “despite the people, for the people”⁵⁶² reflects the nature of the populist discourse of that period.⁵⁶³ Moreover, this is not the first time Türkiye has encountered populism. If we leave aside the relationship between the “populism” of the Republican People’s Party in the single-party regime of the 1920s and 1930s and peopleism; populism, together with its religious version, has had a significant impact on Turkish politics since the 1950s, following the transition to a multi-party system⁵⁶⁴. Populism was one of the factors that brought the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP)⁵⁶⁵ to power in the 1950s and kept it in power. In fact, the Republican People’s Party also pursued populist policies

⁵⁵⁷ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2007).

⁵⁵⁸ He was a Turkish writer, sociologist, poet and politician. He served as a member of parliament in the Meclis-i Mebusan and the Turkish Grand National Assembly. He is also known as the “father of Turkish nationalism”.

⁵⁵⁹ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 15.

⁵⁶⁰ Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept”.

⁵⁶¹ Yılmaz, “Atatürk’ün Halkçılık İlkesi Üzerine Bir Tartışma”, 163.

⁵⁶² Jacobinism - Kemalism in its original form in Türkiye. Against the possibility of the re-establishment of tyranny and for the liberation of the people, Jacobinism sees the adoption of a method embodied in the expression “despite the people and for the people” as necessary for the revolution to achieve its goals.

⁵⁶³ M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, “Populism in Turkey: From a Political Style to a Model for Global Politics?,” in *The Routledge Handbook on Contemporary Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2021).

⁵⁶⁴ The multi-party era in Türkiye began in 1945 when a second party, the National Development Party (MKP) led by Nuri Demirağ, was founded in addition to the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and went to the 1946 general elections with a multi-party system. Multi-party life in the Republic had begun with the Progressive Republican Party (TCF; 1924-25) and the Free Republican Party (SCF; 1930), but these parties had very short lives.

⁵⁶⁵ It is known as the Turkish political party that was founded on January 7, 1946, was in the minority in the elections held the year it was founded and ended the 27-year single-party period in the elections held 4 years later (May 14, 1950). It won the elections of 1950, 1954 and 1957 respectively and was in power for 10 years. The Democrat Party was overthrown by the military coup of May 27, 1960, and was closed on September 29, 1960.

in the second half of the 1940s, but it was not as successful as the DP that came after it. In this context, Süleyman Demirel's⁵⁶⁶ right-wing policies in the 1970s should also be mentioned, which emphasized the “threat of communism” on the one hand and religious themes on the other, and Bülent Ecevit's⁵⁶⁷ slightly leftist discourse, which he embodied by emphasizing populism. However, the person who used religious populism most effectively in politics during the same period was Necmettin Erbakan⁵⁶⁸. The “new” aspect of populism in terms of Turkish political life is that it has been referred to for the first time in recent years, along with the authoritarianism of Türkiye.⁵⁶⁹

The DP's experience in Türkiye shared another common characteristic of contemporary populism, continuous attacks on existing institutions. Through its discourse and actions, the DP contributed to a political atmosphere marked by significant polarization in the late 1950s. By establishing a political organization called Fatherland Fronts (*Vatan Cephesi*), the DP utilized state resources, including the radio, the primary mass communication tool in Türkiye at the time, to support this organization. This significantly contributed to the polarization of the country. The deeply polarized state, in turn, provided justification for some young military officers to stage a coup in 1960. If not for the DP's populism laying the groundwork for chaos, crisis, instability, and polarization, the infamous coup might have been averted.⁵⁷⁰

Due to two significant social upheavals, an impactful earthquake in 1999 and a profound economic crisis in 2001, Türkiye experienced a radical shift in political psychology. This shift led to the near disappearance of existing mainstream parties in the 2002 elections, paving the way for the Islamist party, led by Erdoğan, to assume power. In its early years, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) appeared to be a reformist party striving to expand political and personal freedoms. The party was actively engaged in meeting the membership requirements of the EU, which primarily focused on advancing liberal values, especially in terms of the rule of law. Many observers, both within Türkiye and internationally,

⁵⁶⁶ He is the politician who has formed the most governments, with seven governments formed in the period after Türkiye's transition to a multi-party system in 1946, and the longest-serving prime minister in Turkish political history after İsmet İnönü and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

⁵⁶⁷ During his political career, he formed five governments, three of which were coalition governments, and served as Prime Minister of Türkiye in 1974, 1977, 1978-1979 and 1999-2002.

⁵⁶⁸ He is a Turkish mechanical engineer, academic, politician and founder of the National Vision ideology. He served as deputy prime minister and prime minister. In 1974, he became deputy prime minister and state minister in the coalition government established with the Republican People's Party led by Bülent Ecevit.

⁵⁶⁹ Mustafa Erdoğan, “Türkiye’de Popülist Otoriterlik,” 5 March 2019, <http://erdoganmustafa.org/turkiyede-populist-otoriterlik/>.

⁵⁷⁰ Karaömerlioğlu, “Populism in Turkey”, 84.

perceived this period as one marked by liberal reforms. It seemed as though the AKP, originating from the social and cultural periphery with its Islamist roots, could align well with liberal democratic values and politics. During these years, despite holding government and parliamentary control, the party operated within a system of checks and balances sustained by various state institutions, with the military acting as a dominant force in Turkish politics since 1960.⁵⁷¹

Erdoğan's AKP, stands as one of the earliest and most prominent examples of a political genre that gradually began to dominate the global political landscape in the 2010s. Erdoğan's vision of the "New Türkiye" shares significant similarities with populist regimes led by figures such as Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, Viktor Orbán, Narendra Modi, Vladimir Putin, Jair Bolsonaro, and many others. Understanding contemporary Türkiye provides valuable insights into a form of populism, perhaps more aptly termed neo-populism, which can be characterized as the prevailing *Zeitgeist* of our time.⁵⁷² Starting in 2011, it became increasingly evident that the AKP sought to reshape the traditional political power structure in Türkiye, with the ultimate goal of establishing a more authoritarian rule.⁵⁷³ This transformation was marked by a shift toward a one-man regime, characterized by an anti-democratic discourse and oppressive practices.

Until the April 2017 constitutional referendum, it was not clear exactly what kind of political regime the authoritarianism process that Türkiye had been experiencing under the AKP government since 2011 would evolve into. With the full entry into force of the 2017 constitutional amendments following the June 24, 2018, elections, the picture has become clear: The AKP has established a presidential authoritarian regime in Türkiye supported by religious-nationalist populism.⁵⁷⁴

Although the founders of the AKP initially promised to stay away from populism and provide realistic solutions to Türkiye's problems⁵⁷⁵, they went back on their word after coming to power. Similarly, the founders of the AKP stated that they had taken off the "shirt of national opinion" and had not kept their promise that they would not pursue a policy based on the political use of

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Koray Çalışkan, "Toward a New Political Regime in Turkey: From Competitive toward Full Authoritarianism," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 58 (2018).

⁵⁷⁴ Erdoğan, "Türkiye'de Popülist Otoriterlik".

⁵⁷⁵ Yonca Özdemir, "Turkey's Justice and Development Party: An Utmost Case of Neoliberal Populism" (paper, ECPR General Conference, Université de Montréal, Canada, 2015).

religion. Especially after a period starting in 2011, the AKP and its leader Erdoğan seem to have decided on an authoritarian political understanding and practice supported by religious populism.⁵⁷⁶

In Erdoğan's discourses, the concept of the people is often interpreted as the nation (*millet*). However, here the concept of the nation is not used as an expression of a nationalist ideology, but as a way of establishing group unity.⁵⁷⁷ Because populism is the founder of the concept of the people as an organic unity with an essential identity.⁵⁷⁸ The expressions "one nation, one state, one flag, one homeland" and "my nation" that Erdoğan uses in almost every rally should be evaluated in this context. Erdoğan has described the nation as a homogeneous and organic community in his election speeches. Erdoğan, who shapes the nation according to the image of a religious-national community, also frames the public sphere with religious-cultural boundaries.⁵⁷⁹ This determination is also significant in terms of showing that right-wing populism is constructed on the axis of identity politics.⁵⁸⁰

5.1.2. Erdoğan's Leadership and Policy Making

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is undoubtedly the most controversial figure in recent Turkish political history, and his political dominance is incomparable even by Turkish standards. His influence is so profound that it would be inadequate to attempt to explain Türkiye's recent foreign policy outcomes without considering Erdoğan's leadership. Given his considerable authority and the fact that he has effectively reshaped much of the country's internal balance, his role in shaping foreign policy cannot be ignored.⁵⁸¹ Considering Erdoğan's life story, personality traits and similar elements in the context of his leadership, the scope of the study can be significantly expanded. Therefore, instead of delving into these topics that are more suitable for leadership studies, it would be more appropriate to leave an open space for future research. This study will focus on how the populist ideological framework is shaped in Erdoğan's foreign policy discourses and examine how these discourses function in terms of strategies to mobilize public support.

⁵⁷⁶ Erdoğan, "Türkiye'de Popülist Otoriterlik".

⁵⁷⁷ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 91.

⁵⁷⁸ Kazım Ateş, "AKP, Dinsel Popülizm ve Halk-Olmayan," *Mülkiye Dergisi* 41, no. 1 (2017): 110.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁸⁰ Esra Sırma and İsmet Parlak, "Türkiye'de Popülizm-Demokrasi İlişkisi: 24 Haziran Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçimleri Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme," *Memleket Siyaset Yönetim* 33 (2020).

⁵⁸¹ Görener and Ucal, "The Personality and Leadership Style of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan".

Due to his harsh words and increasingly authoritarian actions, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is regularly highlighted in the media worldwide. During his time as prime minister and then president, he was able to effectively change the political climate in Türkiye. Now he is seeking to exert an unparalleled influence in global politics. Erdoğan's rise from mayor of Istanbul to future Muslim global leader was made possible by his ability to exploit or dismantle established institutions of power when they do not suit his purposes. In the meantime, he has remained charismatic as a strong Islamist leader who acts in the best interests of the "people" and the "ummah". Erdoğan is increasingly turning into a populist authoritarian, using populist tactics and subverting democratic institutions.⁵⁸²

Since the 1970s and 1980s, when the Islamist Necmettin Erbakan led the National Vision (*Milli Görüş*), Erdoğan's worldview and narrative have always included populist elements that portrayed him and Muslim Turks as the rightful and morally superior owners of Türkiye, despite their oppression and the rejection of their collective will by the Kemalist elite. However, as Erdoğan consolidated his grip on power in the early 2010s, his populism intensified, and its anti-Western conspiratorial component strengthened.⁵⁸³

When looking at the external dynamics that shape Erdoğan's leadership characteristics, it is possible to state that his personality has evolved in response to both domestic pressures and international challenges.⁵⁸⁴ This transformation generally coincides with the characteristics of populist leadership, which adapts its personality to maximize its appeal to the masses. The portrayal of Erdoğan's leadership, especially as a protector of the nation's sovereignty and identity, strengthens the populist discourse. Due to his modest upbringing, Erdoğan has always had the advantage of proving himself as a man of the people throughout his long political career. This is why he has separated himself from the military and political "elite".⁵⁸⁵ His followers have been inspired by his fairytale childhood story: a poor young man growing up in a poor and angry urban environment on the outskirts of the richer and more Westernized neighborhoods of

⁵⁸² Ihsan Yilmaz, *Erdogan's Political Journey: From Victimised Muslim Democrat to Authoritarian, Islamist Populist* (European Center for Populism Studies, Deakin University, 2021), <https://populismstudies.org/erdogans-political-journey-from-victimised-muslim-democrat-to-authoritarian-islamist-populist/>.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸⁴ Ali Balcı and İbrahim Efe, "Exogenous Dynamics and Leadership Traits: A Study of Change in the Personality Traits of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 10, no. 2 (2021).

⁵⁸⁵ Mark Lowen, "Erdogan's Turkey," *BBC News*, April 13, 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idthsh/Erdogans_Turkey; BBC News, "Profile: Recep Tayyip Erdogan," *BBC News*, July 18, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2270642.stm>.

Istanbul, his upward mobility and his rise to become the leader of Türkiye.⁵⁸⁶ While others rightly criticize his populist and autocratic tendencies, others see him as the chosen “sultan” or “caliph” for the “New Türkiye” and perhaps even the Muslim world.⁵⁸⁷ However, a closer look reveals that Erdoğan’s political philosophy is essentially a shapeshifter; he will refrain from anything to maintain his political position, even at the cost of destroying the country’s institutional framework and creating serious divisions in a multi-ethnic and religious society.⁵⁸⁸

Erdoğan’s neo-populist regime⁵⁸⁹, akin to others, is illiberal and fundamentally opposed to various forms of pluralism. Similar to the DP’s approach, it is rooted in a simplistic understanding of democracy solely centered around electoral success. The fairness of elections becomes inconsequential.⁵⁹⁰ More troubling is the tendency of AKP’s leading politicians to reject election results if unfavorable. The 2019 mayoral elections in Istanbul, which the AKP lost, exemplify this behavior. Despite lacking evidence, Erdoğan alleged election rigging, leading to a re-election that he ultimately lost by a significant margin.⁵⁹¹ The DP and the AKP shared a similar perspective on the majoritarian view of democracy. In their view, democracy is essentially limited to the electoral process. The Young Turks⁵⁹² and the Kemalists, on the other hand, argue against applying the majoritarian concept of democracy, as their inclination leans towards a single-party regime from the outset.

Erdoğan’s political style is an important example to show how populism comes into being when it becomes a tool of right-wing governments. This style of discourse shapes the political field with tensions and hostile discourses, moving it away from the agonistic form of democracy.⁵⁹³ Populist governments follow a policy that divides the people into us and the others, responds authoritarily to any reaction from the other, and controls the judiciary and the media. Just like

⁵⁸⁶ Soner Çağaptay, “The New Sultan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey,” *The International Spectator* 53, no. 4 (2018): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2018.1503857>.

⁵⁸⁷ Lowen, “Erdoğan’s Turkey”.

⁵⁸⁸ Kaya Genç, “Erdoğan’s Way: The Rise and Rule of Turkey’s Islamist Shapeshifter,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 5 (2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2019-08-12/erdogans-way>.

⁵⁸⁹ Akif Bahadır Kaynak, “Rise of Neo-populism and the Decline of European Agenda in Turkey,” *Beykent Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 9, no. 1 (2016).

⁵⁹⁰ Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, “Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016).

⁵⁹¹ Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, “Killing Competitive Authoritarianism Softly: The 2019 Local Elections in Turkey,” *South European Society and Politics* 24, no. 3 (2019): 317–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2019.1666673>.

⁵⁹² It is the name given to the “young and intellectual” generation that emerged in the last period of the Ottoman Empire and were opposed to the constitutional monarchy during the reign of Abdulhamid II. (Findley, C. V., & Anadol, A. (2006). *Dünya Tarihinde Türkler*. Kitap Yayınevi.)

⁵⁹³ Sırma and Parlak, “Türkiye’de Popülizm-Demokrasi İlişkisi.”

Viktor Orbán, who has been the Prime Minister of Hungary since 2010, Erdoğan also resembles European populists with his authoritarian political style that sees all opposition as enemies and morally inferior and ignores objections from civil society. However, the most important attitude that distinguishes Erdoğan from European right-wing populists is the absence of a policy based on anti-immigration. Unlike European right-wing politics based on anti-immigration and xenophobia, Erdoğan has actually followed a policy expected from the left with his inclusive discourses towards Syrians. Another characteristic of European right-wing populist politicians is their inward-looking policies and reactive attitudes towards international organizations such as the EU. On the contrary, Erdoğan has clearly stated that he has not given up on his EU membership goals. However, he also voices harsh criticisms of the EU from time to time.⁵⁹⁴ At first glance, Erdoğan's reactionary attitude towards international organizations can be likened to the attitude of right-wing populist politicians in Europe. Yet, the most important factor that encourages this reactionary attitude of populist politicians in Europe is their racist-nationalist and cultural protectionist approaches. On the other hand, Erdoğan reacts to the silence of these organizations regarding attacks on Muslims in Middle Eastern countries such as Syria and Palestine and the refugee problem, which brings him closer to the reactionary attitude of left-wing populists.⁵⁹⁵

Apart from Erdoğan's overall politics, lastly it must be noted that, the president supports his populist discourse through the gestures. From his early years, Erdoğan was known for his extraordinary ability to memorize, especially praised for his vocal modulation in terms of amplitude and frequency, a trait recognized by observers and politicians. Initially, he used minimal body movements to enhance his personal appeal and political messages. When his national leadership is analyzed, two distinct periods emerge. The first period extends from 2001, when Erdoğan founded the AKP and the party came to power in 2002, to 2011⁵⁹⁶, when political conflict increased. The second period begins in 2011 and continues to the present day, with the

⁵⁹⁴ The most typical of these criticisms is the statement “the world is bigger than five”, criticizing UN policies in his speech to the UN General Assembly on 20.09.2016.

⁵⁹⁵ Sırma and Parlak, “Türkiye’de Popülizm-Demokrasi İlişkisi”, 174.

⁵⁹⁶ This period can also be described as a turbulent period due to the problems arising from the change of government, the removal of six zeros from the Turkish Lira, relations with the EU, the 2008 economic crisis and finally the 2010 constitutional amendment referendum. The 2010 Turkish constitutional amendment referendum was the submission of a number of amendments to the Constitution in Türkiye to a referendum on September 12, 2010. The package, which included a twenty-six-article amendment, was submitted to a referendum by President Abdullah Gül after being approved by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. As a result of the referendum, the constitutional amendments were accepted with 57.88% yes and 42.12% no votes.

2017 referendum⁵⁹⁷ serving as a significant turning point. In the first phase, Erdoğan's rhetoric and body language were more cautious and focused on adapting to his colleagues while using a multi-faceted vocal approach. However, after 2011, Erdoğan transformed into a more assertive authoritarian leader, adopting confrontational rhetoric and body language.⁵⁹⁸

5.2. Erdoğan's Discourses During the Parliamentary Election Periods

As argued in the relevant section of the Hungarian case, shaping the populist narrative of the division between "us" and "them" is crucial for developing government policies. Moreover, this narrative reinforces the discursive characterization of polarized language in line with the political position of the ruling party. In the Turkish case, Erdoğan's 2018 and 2023 general election speeches are examined to understand these processes and provide an opportunity for comparative assessment with the public speeches in the previous case.

With the support of the "people", Erdoğan has changed the fundamental structure of Turkish society. A repressive Kemalist state is giving way to an aggressively dictatorial and vindictive Islamist regime in Türkiye. Democratic checks and balances have been effectively eliminated, state institutions are propagating the populist rhetoric of Erdoğanism, and all opposition is securitized and viewed as "enemies".⁵⁹⁹

5.2.1. 2018 General Elections

According to the official election calendar for the Presidential and 27th Term Parliamentary General Elections held on June 24, 2018, the election process officially began on Monday, April 30, 2018. The election campaign period began on Sunday, May 13, 2018, coinciding with the finalization of the candidate lists. On the eve of the election, a propaganda ban was implemented starting at 18:00 on June 23, 2018. This section examines all of Erdoğan's speeches published on the official presidential website in this time frame. Particular attention is drawn to the speeches analyzed within the scope of this study that explicitly address foreign policy-making

⁵⁹⁷ The 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum was a referendum held on April 16, 2017. Voters voted on changes to 18 articles of the current Turkish Constitution. After a long debate on the amendments, supported by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and its founder President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the decision to pass the parliament to hold a referendum was taken with the support of the opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The amendment package includes the abolition of the current parliamentary system and the introduction of a presidential system, and many changes in the legislative, executive and judicial sectors, including the elimination of the office of prime minister. The constitutional amendment proposal was first announced by the AK Party immediately after the 2011 general elections.

⁵⁹⁸ Charlotte Joppien, "Embodied Practices of Leadership: The Case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," in *Ruler Personality Cults from Empires to Nation-States and Beyond* (Routledge, 2020), 239.

⁵⁹⁹ Yılmaz, *Erdogan's Political Journey*, 19.

processes. Leaders frequently make speeches, but their most intense, comprehensive, and at the same time compact and goal-oriented speeches occur during election periods. Therefore, the rhetoric employed before election periods actually forms the framework for the messages that will be fully conveyed during the elections themselves.

In this section, the President's speeches are analyzed from a political psychological perspective. His rhetoric frequently uses repetitive evocations aimed at mobilizing, influencing and securing voter support during election periods. In particular, it plays an important role in foreign policy discourse and strengthens the main hypothesis of this study: foreign policy cannot be considered in isolation from the dynamics of nation-states. Leaders shape their political narratives in a way that simultaneously affects both domestic and foreign policy.

A recurring theme in Erdoğan's rhetoric is the portrayal of terrorists, foreign powers, and anyone who opposes the "pure" Turkish nation. He frames the ballot box as the sole mechanism of democratic legitimacy⁶⁰⁰ and portrays his supporters as the true heirs of the nation's ancestors dating back to the Ottoman period. His rhetoric often draws on historical narratives and glorifies the past as a way to strengthen national identity and loyalty.⁶⁰¹ This strategic use of history serves as a powerful psychological tool to mobilize voters, legitimizing his political authority while fostering a sense of continuity and national pride.

"We will answer those trying to subdue us through terrorist organizations at the ballot box. And those attempting to discipline us through currency fluctuations and credit ratings will receive an Ottoman slap at the ballot box."⁶⁰²

During 2018 election rallies, Erdoğan has mainly given a place to the coup attempt carried out by the terrorist organization FETO⁶⁰³ on July 15, 2016. This attempt has served as a foundational narrative for constructing populist language and reinforced the dichotomy between "us" and "them". Erdoğan strategically used the coup attempt to strengthen his political

⁶⁰⁰ Zafer Yılmaz, "Erdoğan's Presidential Regime and Strategic Legalism: Turkish Democracy in the Twilight Zone," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 20, no. 2 (2020).

⁶⁰¹ Umut Uzer, "Glorification of the Past as a Political Tool: Ottoman History in Contemporary Turkish Politics," *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 9, no. 4 (2018).

⁶⁰² Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Ülkemizin Sendelemesini Bekleyenlerin Heveslerini Kursaklarında Bırakacağız," *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, September 26, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/94559/-ulkemizin-sendelemesini-bekleyenlerin-heveslerini-kursaklarinda-birakacagiz->.

⁶⁰³ Fethullahist Terrorist Organization. The Fethullahists are an Islamic community and intelligence organization that emerged in the late 1960s, formed by people who came together under the instigation of Fethullah Gülen.

legitimacy and mobilize his voters by portraying his government and supporters as the true defenders of the nation against internal and external enemies.

“It is crucial that July 15th is not forgotten, especially by the younger generation. We must always keep alive the awareness of what actions we can and will take when the time comes, in response to these traitors and terrorists.”⁶⁰⁴

There is a clear distinction in Erdoğan’s discourses regarding Türkiye before and after the 2016 FETO coup attempt. Notably, despite his AKP having been in power since 2002, Erdoğan describes the pre-2016 era as part of the “Old Türkiye”, indirectly distancing his leadership from past policy shortcomings. This rhetorical strategy allows him to position himself as the architect of the “New Türkiye”, and supports the idea that under his leadership, a fundamental transformation has taken place in response to external and internal threats.

“I expect you to deliver a strong message at the ballot box to those nostalgic for the old Türkiye. Show them that this country no longer has any tolerance for obstruction, sabotage, crises, or the ambitions of those who seek to impose their control.”⁶⁰⁵

Populist leaders use a discourse that convinces voters that their victory will lead to a prosperous future in order to mobilize and support public opinion.⁶⁰⁶ In line with this mindset, Erdoğan presents the struggle against July 15, 2016, coup attempt as a “war of independence” necessary to establish a “New Türkiye” and draws parallels with the Turkish War of Independence that led to the foundation of the Republic. This representation emphasizes that Türkiye has defeated external enemies and that the sense of national resilience and sovereignty has been strengthened. From a political psychology perspective, this situation shows how past national traumas are embedded in populist discourse and serve as a powerful tool to mobilize the public by reviving collective memories of struggle and survival.

“...The spirit of July 15, along with this and other epic moments in history, will hopefully continue to live on. On the morning of June 25, we will awaken to a new

⁶⁰⁴ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın İstanbul Gençlik Festivali Gençler ile Buluşma Programı Konuşması,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, May 4, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/92823/cumhurbaskani-recep-tayyip-erdogan-in-istanbul-genclik-festivali-gencler-ile-bulusma-programi>.

⁶⁰⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Ülkemizin Eski Sistemle Kaybedecek Tek Anı Yoktur,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92777/-ulkemizin-eski-sistemle-kaybedecek-tek-ani-yoktur->.

⁶⁰⁶ Hans-Georg Betz, “Populist Mobilization across Time and Space,” in *The Ideational Approach to Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul A. Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy (Routledge, 2018).

day.... Our country will enter a period where it will look to the future with greater confidence.”⁶⁰⁷

In Erdoğan’s discourses, there is a strong connection between the past and present in combination with us vs them populist understanding. “Us” is always represent the pure people who have a same ethos with Erdoğan and his ideological way, and “them” is always the ones both internal and external traitors to the nation’s wholeness.

“In every coup, it was *us* who were imprisoned, oppressed, and suffered. *They* attacked our existence, unity, stability, prosperity, and peace. Yet, we did not falter or break; we did not take a single step back from the struggle. With virtue, determination, and courage, we lifted Türkiye to new heights.”⁶⁰⁸

Erdoğan’s discourse describes internal opposition figures, who are professedly influenced by external forces with hostile intentions towards the Turkish nation, as “evil others”. Particularly, in the foreign policy discourse, the emphasis on the 2016 coup attempt being organized by external forces has played an important role in forging alliances and defining Türkiye’s relations with the international organizations such as the EU.⁶⁰⁹ By consistently contrasting “pure people” with “others”, Erdoğan effectively constructs a political narrative that fosters a sense of domestic unity in the face of perceived external threats, thereby legitimizing his policies and strengthening his support.

Through framing national security concerns in the context of foreign policy, Erdoğan has covertly identified certain foreign countries as threats to Türkiye’s national security. A key aspect of his discourse is to portray Türkiye as a country that adheres to universal international law and criticizes other actors for interpreting these laws in accordance with their own interests. Erdoğan’s foreign policy discourse often emphasizes Türkiye’s isolation or its few alliances in the international arena, creating a psychological basis for presenting himself as a “lone wolf” leader. This narrative not only supports a sense of national resilience but also serves as a populist strategy that positions Erdoğan as the sole defender of the country’s sovereignty from external pressures.

⁶⁰⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Manifestomuzu Yarım Paylaşacağız,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, May 5, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92778/-manifestomuzu-yarin-paylasacagiz->.

⁶⁰⁸ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Adalet ve Kalkınma İdealini Şiar Edindik,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, May 6, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92779/-adalet-ve-kalkinma-idealini-siar-edindik->.

⁶⁰⁹ Ayşe Sözen Usluer, “The July 15 Failed Coup Attempt and Its Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy,” *Bilig: Journal of Social Sciences of the Turkish World* 79 (2016).

“While we exercise our rights derived from international law in a manner that is fully consistent with legal principles, the intransigent attitudes of certain countries are, of course, unacceptable. However, regardless of what they do, we have pursued our own course thus far and will continue to do so. Now, is this law their law, or is it international law?”⁶¹⁰

Erdoğan has strategically used a language that created images of global or evil others to promote national unity and mobilize public support. He consolidated the rally around the flag effect with the slogan “one state, one nation, one flag, one homeland”, which summed up his vision of national solidarity.

“We once again declare to those who plot against our nation, our flag, our homeland, and our state: you will not succeed. The unity and integrity of our nation will always endure. Our flag will always wave in the skies. Our homeland will forever be a home to this nation. Our state will remain eternal.”⁶¹¹

The President often describes his supporters and party’s political base as the “ummah”, a term that goes beyond Turkish national identity and reflects a broader desire to position himself as the representative of the Muslim world. This conceptualization plays an important role in shaping Türkiye’s foreign policy, aligning it with a vision that goes beyond national borders and embraces wider Islamic solidarity. Moreover, Erdoğan’s voters largely identify as religious, confirming the consistency between his rhetoric and political strategy. Notably, his rhetoric does not actively seek to get support from individuals who do not hold religious beliefs.

“We have presented ourselves to the nation with the electoral alliance we established together with the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) and supported by the Great Union Party (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*, BBP). ... Now, we have the People’s Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*). We have united within this alliance because the Ummah needed it ... now is the time for unity and togetherness.”⁶¹²

An analysis of Erdoğan’s speeches from a foreign policy perspective reveals a strategic attempt to structure a public perception. His discourse not only lays the foundation for national unity

⁶¹⁰ Erdoğan, “İstanbul Gençlik Festivali konuşması”.

⁶¹¹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Önümüzdeki dönemde erdem, irade ve cesaretle Türkiye şahlanacak,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 6 May 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92780/-onumuzdeki-donemde-erdem-irade-ve-cesaretle-turkiye-sahlanacak->.

⁶¹² Erdoğan, “Manifestomuzu yarın paylaşacağız”.

but also directs public sentiment toward a common enemy: foreign powers acting against Türkiye. Through framing external actors as threats to the country's existence, Erdoğan promotes the idea that his leadership and party are the sole guarantors of national security and sovereignty. From a political psychological perspective, this fear-based narrative serves to mobilize voters by creating a sense of urgency and dependence on the incumbent government.

“While global malicious actors attempt to inject terrorism and separatist ideologies into our region, Türkiye has strived with all its might to bring peace, tranquility, and security. ...we have made historic progress in securing both our own future and that of our friends. It is no longer possible to take steps contrary to Türkiye's interests in our region. It is no longer possible to create dirty games, manipulate borders, or impose faits accomplis against Türkiye's strong will in our geography.”⁶¹³

“...As long as we maintain our political stability and continue with strong political leadership, Türkiye will not only shout that ‘the world is bigger than five’ but will also demonstrate to friends and foes alike that the world is indeed larger than five. Our fight against terrorism is a part of our struggle for independence.”⁶¹⁴

Presenting the leader as a hero who defends the disadvantaged is one of the most important narratives in populist politics for mobilizing voters.⁶¹⁵ In his foreign policy speeches, Erdoğan uses this image to portray himself as a defender of the Muslim population worldwide. The language used also determines the country's place in international relations. In his speeches, the President often emphasizes solidarity with the Muslim World and advances a populist narrative that appeals to supporters with staunch religious beliefs.

“We did not merely bring attention to the massacres; we also activated mechanisms to ensure accountability. Without being deterred by the indifference of others, we became the voice of conscience and the hope of oppressed regions using our own resources. Today, we are the country that provides the most humanitarian aid in the world. We stood for mercy against oppression, mutual benefit against exploitation, and brotherhood against arrogance. We have always maintained our strong sensitivity towards our national cause, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. We defended the

⁶¹³ Erdoğan, “Adalet ve kalkınma idealini şiar edindik”.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Heroes, Presidents, and Politics,” *Contexts* 9, no. 4 (2010).

cause of the oppressed Palestinian people on every platform. In Davos, we stood up to the occupiers and said, ‘one minute’. That ‘one minute’ was a significant milestone.”⁶¹⁶

“The world is bigger than five ... We are seeking justice for humanity, and God willing, sooner or later, we will achieve this. Perhaps not immediately, but one day we will witness the fulfillment of the justice demands of the world’s oppressed. Until that day, our duty is to continue the struggle without interruption.”⁶¹⁷

President Erdoğan has emphasized that they opened the doors without hesitation to the millions of refugees who came to Türkiye from Syria and Iraq; “*sharing our homes and bread as a nation.*”⁶¹⁸

“To defend Palestine and Jerusalem means to defend everything that has been good, beautiful, right, and just throughout the ancient history of humanity. ... We will pursue the Israeli administration, which writes the name of Palestine and Jerusalem alongside oppression, in both this world and the hereafter.”⁶¹⁹

The discourse including Palestine and other oppressed Muslim countries has primarily framed within the context of the Muslim community, closely aligned with Erdoğan’s political ideology, and resounds deeply with his supporters. In Turkish politics, especially from Erdoğan’s ideological perspective, welcoming Muslim refugees has been not only a humanitarian act but also a strategic foreign policy tool.⁶²⁰ The Syrian migration crisis was initially turned into a domestic political agenda and received unwavering support from voters.

“Regardless of the cost, we will stand by justice, truth, and the oppressed until the end. For us, this stance is not situational but principled. We demonstrate the same stance regarding Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Crimea, and Nagorno-Karabakh. We have never considered the identity of the oppressed, and we will not. Despite being the 17th largest economy in the world, our leading position in humanitarian aid relative to national

⁶¹⁶ Erdoğan, “Adalet ve Kalkınma İdealini Şiar Edindik”.

⁶¹⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Ülkemize gelen öğrencilere sadece okullarımızı değil gönül dünyamızı da açıyoruz,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 12 May 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92876/-ulkemize-gelen-ogrencilere-sadece-okullarimizi-degil-gonul-dunyamizi-da-aciyoruz->.

⁶¹⁸ Erdoğan, “Adalet ve Kalkınma İdealini Şiar Edindik”.

⁶¹⁹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Filistinliler dünyadaki tüm mazlumların sembolüdür,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 5 May 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92783/-filistinliler-dunyadaki-tum-mazlumlarin-semboludur->.

⁶²⁰ Rabia Karakaya Polat, “Religious Solidarity, Historical Mission and Moral Superiority: Construction of External and Internal ‘Others’ in AKP’s Discourses on Syrian Refugees in Turkey,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 15, no. 5 (2018).

income is due to this approach. The reason we have hosted 3.5 million Syrians who sought refuge in our country to save their lives and honor is this attitude. The reason we have implemented a development model in Somalia, suffering from instability and hunger, with approximately one billion dollars in support, setting an example for the world, is this humanitarian behavior.”⁶²¹

“The struggle of Türkiye is the struggle of all the oppressed and marginalized. Our struggle is the fight of the silent masses whose future has been stolen. Türkiye’s struggle is the struggle of the Palestinians, the Rohingya, Africans, the people of Turkestan, and the oppressed peoples of Asia. I expect you, my young brothers and sisters, to wholeheartedly defend this struggle of our nation. Without succumbing to the slanders of the treacherous FETO members and separatists, I want you to counter the propaganda against our country by spreading the truth about the real Türkiye.”⁶²²

Additionally, Erdoğan refers to the Quran as “our holy book” and positions himself as a defender of oppressed people. By referring to the Quran as “our holy book”, he positions himself as its defender and protector, while at the same time covertly referring to himself and all those who accept it as their holy text. By using this rhetorical device, he is able to establish himself as a defender of Islamic principles and strengthen his reputation as a leader who defends Islam and condemns any perceived injustice against it.

“As we continue to warn Western countries about Islamophobia, Turkophobia, xenophobia, and racism, our reputation suffers. Hey, West, as you attack our holy book, know this: we will not attack your sacred things, but we will bring you down, mark my words. Who do you think you are to attack our sacred beliefs? We know just how despicable you are. You’ve done this everywhere, and you’re still doing it. We didn’t just meet you yesterday. However, no matter how much you do this, we will not respond to your sacred things in the same way.”⁶²³

⁶²¹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Kudüs’ün İsrail Tarafından Gasp Edilmesine Asla İzin Vermeyeceğiz,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92916/-kudus-un-israil-tarafindan-gasp-edilmesine-asla-izin-vermeyecegiz->.

⁶²² Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Türkiye’nin Mücadelesi Tüm Ezilenlerin, Ötekileştirilenlerin Mücadelesidir,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, May 13, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92902/-turkiye-nin-mucadelesi-tum-ezilenlerin-otekilestirilenlerin-mucadelesidir->.

⁶²³ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Fransa’daki Kur’an Bildirisi: ‘Bizim Kutsallarımıza Saldırıyorsunuz,’” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/92786/fransa-daki-kur-an-bildirisi-bizim-kutsallarimizaya-saldiriyorsunuz->.

Erdoğan has, similar to Orbán’s rhetoric, frequently emphasized that losing the election would have catastrophic consequences for the nation. The belief that the upcoming election would be a major and existential turning point has been reinforced by this fear-based narrative, which acts as a powerful mobilizing tool. Erdoğan has hoped to instill a sense of urgency in his followers and encouraged them to vote out of fear rather than pure political preference, by implying that this could be the “last real election” if the current administration would not win.

“Based on the outcome of this election, our country will either continue the uninterrupted 16-year journey of democracy and development or lose many of the hard-earned gains achieved through tough struggles. ... As our nation has done until now, on June 24, it will once again reflect its will freely at the ballot box. We have not recognized, and do not recognize, any power above national will. I have no doubt that in the June 24 elections, where our country will step into a new era, our nation will make the most accurate decision again. I especially urge you to support the 2023 goals that represent our country’s hopes in every field from democracy to the economy.”⁶²⁴

“The June 24 elections are among the most important elections in the history of our country. ... We will either leave a much more prosperous country to our children or return to the old Türkiye begging for money at the doors of the IMF.”⁶²⁵

“Those who look to Pennsylvania, listen to America, and align their hearts with Qandil will bring no benefit to this country. If it were up to them, the flags of the separatist organization would still be flying in Afrin instead of our flag. ... If it were up to them, ISIS murderers would still be running rampant just across our border. If it were up to them, FETO would still be draining the lifeblood of our nation. If it were up to them, bombs would still be exploding all over our country.”⁶²⁶

5.2.2. 2023 General Elections

The campaign period for the 2023 General and Parliamentary Elections lasted from March 18, 2023, to May 13, 2023. As in the previous section, Erdoğan’s speeches taken from the official

⁶²⁴ Erdoğan, “Kudüs’ün İsrail Tarafından Gasp Edilmesine Asla İzin Vermeyeceğiz”.

⁶²⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “‘El Birliği İçinde Türkiye’yi Şaha Kaldırmanın Hayalini Kuruyoruz’,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.tcgb.gov.tr/haberler/410/94040/-el-birligi-icinde-turkiye-yi-saha-kaldirmanin-hayalini-kuruyoruz->.

⁶²⁶ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “‘Gerekirse Sincar’a Gideceğiz, Gereğini Yapacağız’,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, June 5, 2018, <https://www.tcgb.gov.tr/haberler/410/94293/-gerekirse-sincar-a-gidecegiz-geregini-yapacagiz->.

presidential website were selected to be analyzed within the framework of populist foreign policy making. What makes the 2023 elections different is that the campaign process began immediately after the Kahramanmaraş earthquake⁶²⁷ on February 6, 2023. Given the magnitude and socio-political repercussions of this disaster, Erdoğan's rhetoric during the election campaign needs to be examined in this specific context. Although government-affiliated municipalities and construction companies (many of which are known for their close ties to the ruling party) are widely perceived as responsible for the destruction and significant loss of life following the earthquake, the election results still favored Erdoğan and the AKP. This phenomenon deserves to be examined from multiple perspectives, especially in the areas of political psychology and electoral behavior.

Equally significant is the opposition's failure to achieve victory despite the perception that the government was responsible for the disaster. On the one hand, there was a government that was held responsible for the widespread destruction caused by the earthquake, which resulted in significant human and material losses. On the other hand, the opposition failed to capitalize on the crisis and effectively communicated how it would solve the problems it criticized. This strategic shortcoming contributed to the opposition and its supporters continuing to be framed as the "enemy other" in the government's and Erdoğan's populist rhetoric.

A historical parallel can be drawn with the 1999 earthquake⁶²⁸ and the subsequent economic crisis, which led to the electoral defeat of the ruling government and, ironically, paved the way for AKP's political dominance starting in 2002 that lasted more than two decades. A comparative study of the elections that changed the government a few years after the earthquake, the 2023 elections, and the elections planned for 2028 can provide valuable information about political dynamics in Türkiye and the role of political psychology in electoral behavior.

"Türkiye, with its state and its people, possesses the capacity to confront difficulties, transform crises into opportunities, and "rise anew from the ashes". We must, however, avoid heeding those who seek discord and strife. We must not allow any harm to come to our unity, solidarity, and brotherhood. We must not give in to the purveyors of

⁶²⁷ On February 6, 2023, two powerful earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6 occurred in the eastern and central parts of Türkiye, causing great destruction and significant loss of life in both Türkiye and Syria.

⁶²⁸ 1999 Gölcük Earthquake, İzmit Earthquake, Marmara Earthquake or 17 August 1999 earthquake, the earthquake centered in Kocaeli/Gölcük that occurred on the morning of 17 August 1999 at 03:02 local time. The earthquake, whose instrumental magnitude was measured as Mw=7.4 (Kandilli Observatory) or Mw=7.6 (USGS), caused extensive loss of life and property.

constant pessimism and doom. I pray that God protects our country from all forms of calamity, disaster, and misfortune.”⁶²⁹

The need for cooperation and solidarity in crisis management has been brought to light by recent earthquakes and floods. While there was much skepticism towards international organizations in 2018, there has been a noticeable shift in conversations about how to respond to these latest tragedies. There has been a strategic reassessment of government attitudes towards external actors and external aid, with a greater focus on recognition and approval.

“In these difficult times, we will never forget the solidarity shown by all our friends—institutions, member and candidate countries of the EU, the United Nations, and other international organizations. ... another example of the strong foundations of the relationships between our peoples. The contributions you make ... will assist us in healing the wounds of the earthquake and removing the traces of the disaster. Because our real struggle begins now.”⁶³⁰

While the government’s stance toward international organizations has changed over time, its framing of the domestic opposition and the foreign powers that allegedly support them has remained consistent. Despite projecting an image of mismanagement and a government on the verge of collapse during this election season, the ruling party once again focused its discourse on national security, a highly sensitive issue for the Turkish electorate. Populist discourse continued to draw a sharp distinction between “us”—the Turkish people and those who support the government—and “them”—the opposition and everyone else. While the opposition was accused of collaborating with terrorist organizations, the government also pointed to foreign countries that allegedly supported the opposition, thus strengthening its position in international relations through the lens of populist-nationalist discourse.

“I am aware that these negotiations have reopened old wounds. Especially the leaders and associates of the main opposition party, during this period of the earthquake disaster, have still been working to darken the future of our country at the same table as these

⁶²⁹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “‘Çanakkale Bir Milletın Aslı Kimliğini Bulduđu, Küllerinden Yeniden Doğduđu Bir Dönüm Noktasıdır,’” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, March 18, 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/144307/-canakkale-bir-milletin-asli-kimligini-buldugu-kullerinden-yeniden-dogdugu-bir-donum-noktasidir->.

⁶³⁰ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Bu Zor Günlerde Tüm Dostlarımızın, Uluslararası Örgütlerin Sergilediđi Dayanışmayı Asla Unutmayacağız*, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, March 20, 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/144328/-bu-zor-gunlerde-tum-dostlarimizin-uluslararasi-orgutlerin-sergiledigi-dayanismayi-asla-unutmayacagiz->.

groups. I believe that on May 14, we will collectively thwart these efforts. We are all witnessing how these unacceptable images have emboldened enemies of the nation and the country. Do not let the fact that some are standing guard at the door of the separatist organization's extensions ... discourage you. Türkiye, with its state and people, has the strength, capacity, and resolve to thwart all these schemes. As long as we firmly uphold our unity, solidarity, and brotherhood, there is no issue we cannot overcome."⁶³¹

"Have we succeeded in fighting terrorism? Are there terrorists present? Where is the PKK/YPG now? By God's will, this government has buried these terrorist organizations. It will continue to do so, but currently, we see that Mr. Kemal⁶³² is collaborating with PKK's extensions in Parliament⁶³³. He is preparing for the May 14 election with them. Where will we provide the best answer to this? At the ballot box on May 14. ... we will hold them accountable on May 14. I see in your eyes that you are ready for this. One nation, one flag, one homeland, one state."⁶³⁴

Like the 2016 coup attempt, these earthquakes provided the government with an opportunity to construct a war of independence narrative. This framing allowed the government to position itself as the country's sole protector, framing disaster response as a struggle for survival rather than a matter of governance and accountability.

"...We will fight together and rebuild everything that was destroyed, better, more beautiful, and safer. We will regain and replace everything we lost, except for our lives. This nation has come through numerous street riots, political traps, economic snares, terrorist attacks, and global impositions. ...In our vision for the Century of Türkiye, we remain committed to our goal of becoming one of the world's ten most developed

⁶³¹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "*Şehirlerimizi Yeniden Ayağa Kaldırmadan Bize Durmak, Dinlenmek Yok,*" Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, March 23, 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/144386/-sehirlerimizi-yeniden-ayaga-kaldirmadan-bize-durmak-dinlenmek-yok->.

⁶³² The leader of the main opposition party at the time, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. President Erdoğan addressed Kılıçdaroğlu as Mr. Kemal in his speeches.

⁶³³ He was referring to the HDP - The Peoples' Democratic Party is a political party operating in Türkiye, founded on 15 October 2012. According to the party statute, its official abbreviation is "HDP".

⁶³⁴ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "*Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Adıyaman Yeni Afet Konutları Temel Atma Töreni'ne Katıldı,*" Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, March 27, 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/144433/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-adiyaman-yeni-afet-konutlari-temel-atma-toreni-ne-katildi>.

countries. You remember what has been done to deter us over the past decade. We have overcome all obstacles with the faith, determination, and courage of our people.”⁶³⁵

Erdoğan’s discourses focused on the idea of rising together after the earthquakes, aimed to strengthen the collective narrative of national resilience. Through portraying the country as one that has always struggled together against hardship, he presented past and present challenges as part of an ongoing historical struggle, thus aiming to create a sense of harmony and courage. Moreover, populist discourse has consistently mobilized electoral support, as seen in the reemergence of rhetorical patterns from the 2018 elections to 2023.

“We observe that political crises, conflicts, wars, and tensions are prevalent across the country, and that every global crisis impacts our geography. Some societies and states that have not yet resolved their millennia-old grievances with our people... No one dares to directly attack our homeland as in the First World War or the National War, but they do not refrain from ... using terrorist organizations, political and social chaos experiments, and economic traps. ... We have witnessed nearly 40 years of PKK terrorism, the betrayal of FETO trying to stab us like a dagger, and many other trials...”⁶³⁶

“No one has the power to take Türkiye back a quarter or half a century. Our nation will not allow it. Those who walk hand in hand with terrorists have nothing to offer my country... with God’s permission, you will bury them at the ballot box on May 14th.”⁶³⁷

Similar to the 2018 election rhetoric, the 2023 election rhetoric conveyed the message that not only the Turkish nation, but also other oppressed nations were protected. Through this narrative, the portrayal of being the global leader of the Muslim world was strengthened.

⁶³⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “*Yıkılan Her Şeyi Yeniden, Daha İyisiyle, Daha Güzeliyle, Daha Güvenlisiyle Yeniden Yapacağız*,” Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, March 24, 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/144399/-yikilan-her-seyi-yeniden-daha-iyisiyle-daha-guzeliyle-daha-guvenlisiyle-yeniden-yapacagiz->.

⁶³⁶ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “*Askerlerimizin Deprem Bölgesinde Fedakârca Yürüttüğü Çalışmaları Çok İyi Biliyoruz*,” Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, March 28, 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/145441/-askerlerimizin-deprem-bolgesinde-fedak-rca-yuruttugu-calismalari-cok-iyi-biliyoruz->.

⁶³⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “*Türkiye Bu Büyük Afetin de Üstesinden Gelerek, Hedeflerine Doğru İlerlemeye Devam Edecektir*,” Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, March 31, 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/145514/-turkiye-bu-buyuk-afetin-de-ustesinden-gelerek-hedeflerine-dogru-ilerlemeye-devam-edecektir->.

“...We have built a strong, reputable, and honorable Türkiye that is a beacon of hope not only for our own citizens but for all oppressed and suffering people from Africa to Asia. We achieved all this despite numerous obstacles, traps, and attacks. ...The upcoming elections will be the decisive moment...”⁶³⁸

The elections are once again presented as the last opportunity to achieve the targeted goals. At the same time, both foreign and domestic policy narratives are being constructed while the continuation of international cooperation is emphasized.

“We are strengthening our cooperation with the Turkish world in every field. ...We will not stop or deviate from our goals until we realize the great rise we call the Turkish Century. Just like our heroic ancestors did in the 100th year of our Republic, we will write a new success story as 85 million. Remember, May 14th is a turning point for the continuation of all these achievements and the addition of new ones.”⁶³⁹

“...every election is a crossroads. Since we came to power in 2002, we have experienced this crossroads with our nation in every election. As you recall, in the 2007 elections, our nation made a choice between tutelage and national will. In the 2011 elections, our nation made a choice between our 2023 goals and old Türkiye. In the 2015 elections, our nation faced a choice between our independence and future and the attacks of the PKK to divide our homeland and FETO to seize our country. In the 2018 elections, our nation responded to the July 15 coup attempt by supporting our new governance system. Today, we are once again on the eve of an election and facing another choice. On one side, there is the vision of the “Century of Türkiye” with all its aspects, from the earthquake to the National Technology Initiative, from regional sovereignty rights to the goal of becoming a global political and economic power. On the other side, there is the

⁶³⁸ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Hiçbir Kesimi Enflasyona Ezdirmeme, Kayıplarını Telif Etme Sözümüzü Adım Adım Yerine Getiriyoruz,” Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, March 29, 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/145458/-hicbir-kesimi-enflasyona-ezdirmeme-kayiplarini-telif-etme-sozumuzu-adim-adim-yerine-getiriyoruz->.

⁶³⁹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Türkiye’yi yatırımlarla ilmek ilmek dokuyoruz,” Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2 April 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/145549/-turkiye-yi-yatirimlarla-ilmek-ilmek-dokuyoruz->.

dream of the 7-party coalition⁶⁴⁰ and the PKK and FETO leaders who have become their most ardent defenders—a desire for Türkiye under the yoke of imperialists.”⁶⁴¹

The president not only framed the upcoming elections as the last opportunity to achieve national goals but also accused them of potentially surrendering the country to foreign powers if they came to power. This rhetoric gave those in power the opportunity to shape the perception of Turkish voters by drawing on the historical narrative of a nation that fought a War of Independence following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and refused to accept any form of mandate or foreign tutelage.

“They are plotting to overturn our national foreign policy, which has allowed us to exercise our sovereignty rights on a regional and global level after a long time. What does he say? He says he will bring 300 billion dollars from England, from London. They can love you, Bay Bay Kemal⁶⁴². So, did London’s usurers have so much lost money that they will send it to you?”⁶⁴³

“...The imperialists, whom we cut off from our country after a tough struggle, will come back and make us dependent on them again. How will they do this? They will close the valve of the gas we found in the Black Sea, and they will pour concrete over the oil wells we discovered in Gabar, just as they did before. They will tear down the security barriers we established beyond our borders and once again drown our cities in blood and fire.”⁶⁴⁴

“...They will immediately accept the EU’s autonomy condition and open the way to divide Türkiye like other countries around us. They will further this step by returning

⁶⁴⁰ The Nation Alliance is an election alliance established on May 5, 2018, between the Republican People’s Party (CHP), the Good Party, the Felicity Party (SAADET) and the Democrat Party (DP). Later, the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA Party) and the Future Party (Gelecek) joined the alliance. Tayyip Erdoğan stated that the HDP is also in this alliance and called it the 7-party coalition.

⁶⁴¹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Ülkemizi ve milletimizi Türkiye Yüzyılı’na hazırlayacak adımlar atıyoruz,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 23 April 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/145835/-ulkemizi-ve-milletimizi-turkiye-yuzyili-na-hazirlayacak-adimlar-atiyoruz->.

⁶⁴² Tayyip Erdoğan employs a wordplay in his rhetoric. The Turkish word “Bay” corresponds to “Mr.” in English, while “Bye bye” is phonetically read as “Bay bay” in Turkish. By addressing the opposition leader as “Bay Bay Kemal”, Erdoğan subtly implies that his opponent will lose the election while maintaining a seemingly respectful tone in his speech.

⁶⁴³ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Ülkemizi küresel sistemin en üst ligine çıkardık,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 24 April 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/145868/-ulkemizi-kuresel-sistemin-en-ust-ligine-cikardik->.

⁶⁴⁴ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Türkiye’ye olan sevdamız son nefesimize kadar sürecek,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 5 May 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/146995/-turkiye-ye-olan-sevdamiz-son-nefesimize-kadar-surecek->.

the municipalities we have appointed trustees to back to the terrorist organization and by reintroducing the organization members we have removed from public positions into the state. Afterwards, they will flood the country with all the issues that the West has used to force us into submission for years.”⁶⁴⁵

Although Erdoğan, his party and his electorate are generally ideologically distant from Kemalism, his occasional references to Atatürk in some of his speeches can be interpreted as a strategic move to appeal to the Kemalist segments of society. Simultaneously, this rhetorical strategy may function to consolidate support among AKP constituents who, despite not aligning with Kemalist ideology, nonetheless maintain a deep respect for Atatürk as the foundational figure of the Turkish Republic.

“May 14 will be an election that will free our country’s economy from oppression, similar to how Gazi Mustafa Kemal once pointed to the homeland from İzmir a century ago. May 14 will be a victory for the national and local stance against those who want to hand over Türkiye’s economy to London usurers, its security to terrorist organizations, and its foreign policy to imperialists. May 14 will be a choice for the determination to elevate our country and nation to the place they deserve in every field in the new century of our Republic...”⁶⁴⁶

During these elections, the opposition is most frequently portrayed as being “aligned with imperialist powers, walking hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder with them”. Erdoğan frames the “evil other” in this narrative in a straightforward and unambiguous manner, portraying the main opposition party as the domestic extension of foreign forces attempting to undermine the country. In addition to intentionally influencing the trajectory of foreign policy debate and delegitimizing the opposition, this framing strengthens the idea of a country under attack both at home and abroad.

“It is very important for the People’s Alliance⁶⁴⁷ to be in power. If it were up to them, they would turn our country upside down, but we will not give them this opportunity. We will tightly hold on to our unity, togetherness, and brotherhood. We will not give a

⁶⁴⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Türkiye Yüzyılı tüm milletimizin yüzyılı olacak,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 13 May 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/147170/-turkiye-yuzyili-tum-milletimizin-yuzyili-olacak->.

⁶⁴⁶ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “21 yıldır sadece eser ve hizmet siyaseti yaptık,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 29 April 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/146917/-21-yildir-sadece-eser-ve-hizmet-siyaseti-yaptik->.

⁶⁴⁷ *Millet İttifakı*

chance to those who try to sow discord among us. We will bury in the ballot box on May 14th those who seek to come to power through cooperation with FETO members and separatists, instead of relying on the will of the people and the approval...⁶⁴⁸

Erdoğan has claimed that he was the only leader who could protect Türkiye's sovereignty thanks to his superior diplomatic skills, accusing Kılıçdaroğlu of having a wrong evaluation towards foreign powers. This perception not only fuels nationalist sentiments, but also psychologically creates fear and insecurity in the opposition. He has linked his election victory to national security, portrayed foreign actors as threat, and incorporated foreign policy into domestic political discourse. In doing so, he maintains the image of a strong leader who defends his country while ensuring that his populist rhetoric will play a key role in achieving his political goals both domestically and internationally.

“...Bay Bay Kemal has started picking on Russia... He says Russia is directing the elections in Türkiye. Shame, shame on you. If I were to say that America⁶⁴⁹ is directing the elections in Türkiye, that Germany is directing them, that France is directing them, that the United Kingdom is directing them, what would you say? You don't know them as well as I do. I have practically read their souls. I've been meeting with them for 20 years, I've sat at the same tables with them many times over the past 20 years, and I talk with them. How many times have you met them? How do you know them? ...Liars like you won't get a single cent. Because these people know your kind and your character very well...”⁶⁵⁰

5.3. Analysis of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Election Discourses

In President Erdoğan's rhetoric, the Turkish language and the words he chooses can indeed sometimes be characterized as coarse jargon, and even as a colloquial “street language”.⁶⁵¹ This style of communication can have various effects on the masses. Because the electorates see Erdoğan as one of their own, many people may find his use of language warm and relatable and

⁶⁴⁸ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “85 milyon olarak emin adımlarla Türkiye Yüzyılı'na yürüyoruz,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 4 May 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/147003/-85-milyon-olarak-emin-adimlarla-turkiye-yuzyili-na-yuruyoruz->.

⁶⁴⁹ In Turkish, the United States of America is generally called as America.

⁶⁵⁰ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Türkiye'nin potansiyelini asıl hedeflerimize ulaşmak için kullanabileceğimiz yere geldik,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, 12 May 2023, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/147151/-turkiye-nin-potansiyelini-asil-hedeflerimize-ulasmak-icin-kullanabilecegimiz-yere-geldik->.

⁶⁵¹ Ayhan Sariaslan, “Siyasal İletişim Dili ve Parti Disiplini Bağlamında Liderlik Söyleminin İncelenmesi,” *IJSS* 8, no. 36 (2024).

feel more connected to him. Through this conversation, people can better understand complex political issues, and the leader can engage with them on a more personal and intimate level.

The language used in politics has a significant impact on the public's psychology and, therefore, their voting behavior.⁶⁵² Coarse and direct language can evoke a strong emotional response, particularly among broad segments of society.⁶⁵³ This kind of language reinforces the image of the leader as “strong”, “decisive”, and “speaking the people's language”, while portraying opponents as elitist and disconnected from the public. It can be said that Erdoğan's use of this language strengthens his perception among voters and solidifies his leadership position.

President Erdoğan constructs his discourses in a way that combines populism, political psychology and foreign policymaking, which strengthens his political position. His emphasizing Türkiye's autonomous and strong position on the international stage, presenting it as a major actor on the battlefield and in diplomacy rather than a nation that is now subservient to other powers. This attitude carries a potential to appeal to national pride and portrays Erdoğan as a strong leader who protects Türkiye's interests against external threats.

Erdoğan's rhetoric appeals to national identity and shared concerns to mobilize popular support and create a sense of solidarity against common enemies. Through this psychological manipulation, he maintains his potential for re-election at home while pursuing a high-tension foreign policy. The assumption that Erdoğan represents the state, and the state represents Erdoğan is supported by his rhetoric, which tends to establish a connection with Türkiye. Populist leaders often use this rhetorical tool to combine their personal identity with national identity.⁶⁵⁴ In such a framework, a leader's personal beliefs and ideological position are inextricably linked to national identity; if the leader is a strong believer, the nation is portrayed as fundamentally religious; if the leader projects a secular personality, the state is portrayed as free of religious sentiments. Since the leader's perspective and self-perception have a direct impact on Türkiye's status in international relations, this individualized understanding of

⁶⁵² Craig M. Burnett and Vladimir Kogan, “When Does Ballot Language Influence Voter Choices? Evidence from a Survey Experiment,” *Political Communication* 32, no. 1 (2015).

⁶⁵³ Max J. Skidmore, “Populism and Its Perils: Language and Politics,” *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio K–Politologia* 22, no. 1 (2015).; Mariia Sliusarenko, “Obscene Response as an Individually Responsible Act,” *Scientific Studies on Social and Political Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2023).

⁶⁵⁴ Bernard Crick, “Populism, Politics and Democracy,” *Democratisation* 12, no. 5 (2005).; Xin Mao, “The Religiosity of Populism: The Sanctified and Abused Power of the People,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 16, no. 47 (2017).

leadership not only affects domestic politics but also has important implications for foreign policymaking.

“The struggle of the AK Party⁶⁵⁵ is the struggle of Türkiye itself, so much so that the fate of the AK Party has become almost identical with the fate of Türkiye. That’s why the primary target of those attacking Türkiye is the AK Party. What is being done now is to find a way to suppress the AK Party and Erdoğan within a month. I want you to stand by not just the AK Party but your country, by not just your country but your people, and by not just your people but the future of your children. June 24⁶⁵⁶ is a historic turning point in this regard.”⁶⁵⁷

Erdoğan’s focus on terrorism, a highly sensitive issue for the Turkish people, should also be considered when examining his campaign speech. Since Erdoğan and his party are seen by both his followers and himself as the only ones who can protect Türkiye from terrorism, this narrative serves as an effective way to strengthen his support base. Additionally, by stating security concerns, this discourse might influence voters who prioritize national security. The fight against terrorism, while seemingly a domestic security concern, is closely tied to international relations and foreign policy.⁶⁵⁸ How a country handles internal security concerns like terrorism affects its foreign policy, alliances, and diplomatic and strategic interactions on the global scene.

Erdoğan’s populist rhetoric was not limited to rhetorical structures; it was embedded in the institutional and political frameworks of governance. His securitizing language translated into concrete political practices, such as the comprehensive purges targeting alleged members of FETO in the post-2016 period, the increased executive control of the judiciary and media, and the maintenance of a state of emergency mentality that redefined the opposition as a security threat.⁶⁵⁹ These measures demonstrate how populist narratives such as national survival and the “enemy within” were transformed into tools of governance and how populist discourse was

⁶⁵⁵ In addition to being the president, Erdoğan can also be a party member and even a party leader due to the administrative system AKP has changed. It is also seen that Erdoğan frequently identifies his party with himself in his statements.

⁶⁵⁶ Presidential elections were also held in 2023, and since no candidate could exceed 50% of the votes, the presidential elections were postponed to the second round, which was June 24, 2023.

⁶⁵⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Türkiye, Serbest Piyasa Ekonomisini Tüm Kural ve Kurumlarıyla Uygulayan Bir Ülkedir,” *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/94034/-turkiye-serbest-piyasa-ekonomisini-tum-kural-ve-kurumlariyla-uygulayan-bir-ulkedir->.

⁶⁵⁸ Burcu Savun and Brian J. Phillips, “Democracy, Foreign Policy, and Terrorism,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 6 (2009).

⁶⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Silencing Turkey’s Media: The Government’s Deepening Assault on Critical Journalism* (New York: Human Rights Watch, December 2016); Amnesty International, *Weathering the Storm: Defending Human Rights in Turkey’s Climate of Fear* (London: Amnesty International, 2017).

institutionalized within the state apparatus. Moreover, the government has consistently reinforced these narratives through public campaigns (notably “National Will” rallies and state-backed media messages) that portray Erdoğan as the sole guardian of the people’s will.⁶⁶⁰ Opinion polls and surveys conducted by pro-government research organizations and the Presidential Directorate of Communications have been instrumental in calibrating the emotional tone of Erdoğan’s rhetoric, ensuring that his populist messages resonate with voter sentiment and electoral psychology.⁶⁶¹ In this sense, Erdoğan’s rhetoric has functioned not only as a communication strategy but also as a feedback-driven mechanism that shapes the mutual reinforcement between populist rhetoric, public perception, and policy implementation.

Rewriting historical narratives to suit Erdoğan’s political goals is another aspect of his rhetorical technique. This attempt to rewrite history is one of the most striking aspects of his speech, especially when considering national conflicts such as the 2016 coup attempt, which he portrays as a new “War of Independence”. By portraying Erdoğan’s leadership as a turning point in Türkiye’s history, this narrative aims to elevate the country’s current challenges as significant. By presenting his administration as the rightful heir of the republic’s founders, this mythmaking helps him align his political image with national values. Erdoğan’s use of figurative language is an important tool in creating myths as well as supporting the us-versus-them narrative. Erdoğan uses powerful psychological tactics to galvanize voters by repeatedly referring to his followers as “naive” people and his opponents as “enemies” of the country. His discourse creates a sense of existential danger and urgency, strengthening the call to action at the ballot box. For example, his portrayal of the opposition as partners with foreign powers and terrorist groups is an analogy of the populist strategy of creating a single enemy to defend his authoritarian policies and strengthen national cohesion.

Erdoğan uses his populist rhetoric as an effective tool to influence both domestic and foreign affairs. By endorsing a foreign policy that prioritizes Turkish interests over international cooperation, especially cooperation with Western countries, his statements present him as a defender of Turkish sovereignty and national identity. Due to his ultra-nationalist rhetoric and his emphasis on Türkiye’s isolation, he appears as a leader willing to withstand international pressure to protect his country’s independence. However, it should be emphasized that

⁶⁶⁰ Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, *Public Communication Directorate Reports* (Ankara: Directorate of Communications, 2018–2023).

⁶⁶¹ KONDA Research and Consultancy, *Türkiye’de Seçmen ve Siyaset 2018–2023* (Istanbul: KONDA, 2023).

Erdoğan’s nationalism does not solely refer to the Turkishness, but rather a nationalism that unites around an ummah, as has been previously stated.

In conclusion, Erdoğan’s speeches during the election campaign periods powerfully combine political psychology, foreign policy framing, and populist rhetoric. His use of plainspoken language, historical narratives, and metaphors creates a strong sense of national identity that ties his leadership to Türkiye’s sovereignty and international recognition. In addition to rallying support domestically, Erdoğan uses his speeches to influence how the world views Türkiye, presenting himself as a global leader and national hero who protects the country from both domestic and external threats. In an increasingly polarized domestic and global political environment, this rhetorical technique maintains his legitimacy, solidifies his authority, and ensures his political survival.

Table 3. Summary of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Election Discourses

Year	Highlighted External Threats	Internal Opponents	Dominant Themes	Populist Frame (Us vs Them)	Heroic Self-Portrayal	Strategic Foreign Policy Narrative	Analyzed number of speeches (FP + U/T Dichotomy)
2018	FETO, Western states, Global elites	CHP, Secular elites	Coup trauma, National pride, Islam	Ummah/nation vs Traitors/West	Defender of Muslim world	Anti-Westernism, Islamic solidarity, post-coup legitimacy	78 (Example: Speeches focusing on external threats)
2023	PKK, Foreign-backed opposition, Imperialists	Opposition coalition, Kılıçdaroğlu	Earthquake response, Security, Survival	Nation vs Terror supporters/Foreigners	Last line of defense	Post-crisis resilience, defense against foreign manipulation	82 (Example: Speeches focusing on external threats)

Source: Author’s own editing

CHAPTER 6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This part of the study aims to clarify the structures and purposes of the “us and them” narrative in the political discourses of Erdoğan and Orbán using a comparative perspective. Through this distinction and comparative examination, the main research question of the dissertation, “How does political psychology contribute to the understanding of populist international relations?” will be answered in a summative manner. The results obtained from the case studies conducted in the previous part will be examined in a comparative manner for this purpose. References to the theoretical issues raised in the relevant part will enrich the discussion. Furthermore, when necessary, the discussion will benefit from references to relevant literature on the case political leaders and populist politics in Hungary and Türkiye.

The discussion will be structured in four closely interconnected parts. The evolution of populism in the discourses examined will be the first part. The study will compare the cases to identify specific and shared components in conceptualizations of the us-versus-them worldview, as well as to determine which parts and dimensions are prioritized and emphasized. The next part will examine and compare the ways in which leaders use their discourses to reposition and reshape their voters and choices. Thus, the ways in which populist discourses support and legitimize leaders’ policies will be examined. The role of populist discourses in positioning the case nations in the international arena will be examined in the next part. The comparative section will conclude by discussing how leaders construct the concepts of “us” and “who is against us”. An attempt will be made through this four-way comparative data review to understand how the elected right-wing leaders of power, Orbán and Erdoğan, construct their discourses around the narrative of “us against them” and how their discourses play a role in their political tactics. Another goal of this strategy is to find distinct and recurring themes in the speeches of these political leaders.

6.1. Populism

As discussed in the theoretical section, populism has been portrayed as a contemporary political zeitgeist.⁶⁶² Likewise, leaders’ conceptualizations of the phenomenon are the most salient indicators of how their populism operates in any political arena.⁶⁶³ As noted earlier, emotions

⁶⁶² Peters and Pierre, “A Typology of Populism”.

⁶⁶³ Takis S. Pappas, *Populism Emergent: A Framework for Analyzing Its Contexts, Mechanics, and Outcomes*, EUI Working Papers, RSCAS 2012/01 (Florence: European University Institute, 2012), 2, 3.

and values are not complementary to populism, but rather its primary drivers. Fear, anger, and pride are mobilized to frame political choices as moral imperatives rather than pragmatic decisions. Thus, in both Hungary and Türkiye, populism emerges as an emotional mode of governance that constructs national belonging through shared resentment and perceived injustice. Therefore, comparing Orbán and Erdoğan's discursive conceptualizations of populism with the findings of the analyses can help to understand the foundations of their populist policies. Thus, one of the supporting research questions is: *why is populist discourse necessary for leaders to maintain power in their countries?* can be answered based on the following comparison.

Erdoğan and Orbán's discourses contain both opposing and similar elements. To begin with, populism in Türkiye has a longer historical trajectory than the form observed in Hungary today. Erdoğan's populist discourse has deeper roots in historical narratives. In contrast, Orbán's populism gained momentum, particularly after the migration crisis of 2015, and shaped its current form.⁶⁶⁴ After 2014, Hungary's domestic political landscape underwent a significant transformation that further shaped the trajectory of Fidesz's populism. The radical-right Jobbik party, once Fidesz's fiercest competitor, began to move toward the political center in an attempt to gain broader legitimacy. In response, Fidesz intensified its nationalist, anti-immigrant, and Eurosceptic rhetoric to maintain dominance over right-wing voters. Scholars note that since 2010, Fidesz has closely followed Jobbik's agenda and often adopted its themes and policy proposals, effectively mainstreaming far-right ideas.⁶⁶⁵ This pattern was visible in several key policy areas, such as the 2010 citizenship law extending nationality to ethnic Hungarians abroad, the "Eastern Opening" policy after 2012, and the harsh anti-immigration measures following the 2015 migration crisis.⁶⁶⁶ This led to the widespread saying, "what Jobbik says, Fidesz does," encapsulating how Orbán's party appropriated radical narratives to consolidate power. By co-opting Jobbik's discourse, Fidesz gradually transformed into a more radical, illiberal, and anti-EU force within Hungarian politics.⁶⁶⁷ A comparable process occurred in Türkiye after 2015, when the AKP's alliance with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) reinforced nationalist and exclusionary tendencies, moving Erdoğan's discourse into a more radical field. Though the two developments stemmed from distinct contexts, both demonstrate

⁶⁶⁴ Viktor Glied, "The Populist Phenomena and the Reasons for Their Success in Hungary," *Politics in Central Europe* 16, no. 1 (2020): 38, <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2020-0002>.

⁶⁶⁵ Kim, "From Mainstream to Extreme."

⁶⁶⁶ Buzogány and Varga, "The Ideological Context of Hungary's 'Eastern Opening' Policy".

⁶⁶⁷ Enyedi, "Populist Polarization and Party System Institutionalization".

how right-wing populists instrumentalize ideological competition to justify increasingly nationalist and anti-liberal governance.⁶⁶⁸

Orbán's discourse is largely framed around anti-immigrant and anti-foreign sentiments.⁶⁶⁹ Besides, being a member of the EU has an impact on countries and their leaders. Since Orbán is the leader of an EU member state, the scope of his populism remains relatively limited in its impact. While the EU *acquis* does not directly interfere with the domestic legal systems of its member states, it exerts a significant constraining effect on the policy flexibility of national leaders. Unlike Hungary, Türkiye lacks a supranational body similar to the EU, as well as an effective mechanism to monitor or enforce compliance with such a framework. As a result, President Erdoğan is able to pursue populist policies with greater freedom and autonomy. Therefore, Erdoğan has been in power for over two decades. As discussed earlier in this paper, his political approach has deep historical roots, dating back to Türkiye's transition to a multi-party system. This long-standing foundation allows Erdoğan's populism to have a broader and deeper impact in both domestic and international politics.

Through nationalist rhetoric, populist mobilization, the creation of both domestic and foreign opponents, and their parties' connection to the nation they serve, both leaders have established enduring authority. Despite using similar strategies, aspects of Türkiye's and Hungary's populist strategies have been shaped by their respective historical, cultural, and geopolitical histories. Both Erdoğan and Orbán use populism as a governing tool and electoral tactic, sustaining their political power with insistent discourses about existential dangers, cultural identity, and national sovereignty. By identifying himself with the state, populist leaders blur the distinction between their personal power and national sovereignty and direct their countries' foreign policy in line with their own populist style of governance.

Crisis narratives are fertile grounds for populist rhetoric. Events like the 2023 earthquake and the 2016 coup attempt are critical to quelling political opposition and strengthening Erdoğan's authority, which will be examined detailed later. In Hungary, migration flows, and the Russo-Ukrainian war have had the same effect during Orbán's election campaign. Crises also have an important impact on populist discourses, as they provide leaders with the opportunity to reaffirm their legitimacy and consolidate their power.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁸ Csehi and Zgut-Przybylska, "Countering National-Level Populism".

⁶⁶⁹ Glied, "The Populist Phenomena", 36-38.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25, 26.

Both leaders portrayed themselves as saviors of the nation and used the crisis events to solidify their positions of authority. The results show that Erdoğan's rhetoric was marked by a strong nationalist tone, the creation of dissidents at home and abroad, and the confusion of his leadership with the identity of the state. Erdoğan first framed the failed 2016 coup attempt to subvert the themes discussed throughout the research. By portraying the failed effort as a turning point and dubbing it "War of Independence 2.0", Erdoğan was able to defend his suppression of the media, civil society, and opposition. Under the guise of national security, this rhetoric has enabled him to legitimize mass purges, increase executive power, and suppress critics. When comparing these two crises, it becomes clear that Erdoğan's rhetoric has consistently transformed national tragedies into political narratives that support his leadership and weaken opposition forces. Similarly, despite significant criticism of the government's poor leadership, its response to the 2023 earthquake focused on preserving national unity under its rule. While the government's response to the disaster was widely criticized, Erdoğan's discourse has emphasized the country's strength and solidarity. The idea that Türkiye could only be rebuilt under his leadership was reinforced by framing the earthquake as yet another national test. Furthermore, the 2023 rhetoric included expressions of gratitude for foreign aid, indicating a deliberate shift in diplomatic orientation, whereas the 2018 rhetoric was mostly critical of international institutions. Orbán used the 2015 refugee crisis to his advantage, portraying migrants as existential threats to Hungarian identity. This resulted in strict immigration laws and the militarization of Hungary's borders. His responses to COVID-19 and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine have further highlighted Hungary's need for a strong leader who can withstand external pressure. Both leaders are reinforcing their importance to the country's existence by turning crises into opportunities for political advantage.

Although both leaders employ populist tactics based on nationalism, crisis management and the instrumentalization of foreign policy, their methods have been shaped differently by their historical backgrounds and geopolitical conditions. Orbán's populism is defensive and Eurocentric, aiming to protect Hungary from liberal Western influence, while Erdoğan's populism is expansionist and Islamist, seeking Türkiye's international legitimacy. Despite their differences, populist models of governance offer important insights into the relationship between populism, political psychology and foreign policy, and provide examples of how leaders use international relations for domestic political survival.

6.2. Perspectives on Elections and People

Here, while comparing the roles assumed by the two leaders, the sub-research questions of the study, *how does a leader's discourse change in response to electoral concerns, and what impact does this have on foreign policy?* and *how do leaders utilize the populist discursive dichotomy to shape public opinion and international relations?* will be summarized. Following the logic pointed out by Gustave Le Bon⁶⁷¹ nearly two centuries ago, crowds sought consoling rhetoric and the figure of a potential savior. In this context, Orbán and Erdoğan did not neglect to position themselves as saviors of their nations while constructing their discourses during election periods. As will be explained in detail later, both leaders have assigned themselves the duty of protecting their people/masses at all costs against potential dangers they perceive. They have always presented the only way to protect their masses as a condition that they emerge as leaders in the elections. Since the situation outside is *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the nation needs to be strengthened.⁶⁷²

The need for a more comprehensive international comparative analysis led the study to choose to focus solely on the general elections. This strategy is further supported by Erdoğan's dual responsibilities as president and head of state. Although Erdoğan is president, he also remains the leader of the ruling party as a result of the amended law. This strategy is also important and valid in Orbán's case due to his role as prime minister of Hungary. Through centralized power, Orbán has shaped Hungary's political landscape as the leader of Fidesz, maintaining firm control over both party and the government. This distinct political system highlights the importance of general elections as a starting point for investigating populist rhetoric and electoral tactics.

Erdoğan's discourse equates democracy with elections, a perspective that is also evident in Viktor Orbán's discourse. For both leaders, elections have been critical moments because they serve as the primary mechanism for mobilizing voters. In fact, in populist politics, elections are the primary tool for garnering popular support.⁶⁷³ Although democracy and right-wing populism may seem contradictory at first glance, populism derives its legitimacy from

⁶⁷¹ Le Bon, *Kitleler Psikolojisi*.

⁶⁷² Gerim, *Nationalist Discourses in Hungary and Türkiye*.

⁶⁷³ Dominic Wring, Christiane Grill, Norbert Merkovič, and David Deacon, "Populist Politics and the 'Radical Right' in 2014 Elections," in *Political Advertising in the 2014 European Parliament Elections*, ed. Christina Holtz-Bacha, Edoardo Novelli, and Karen Rafter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 98, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56981-3_7.

democratic mechanisms and uses electoral processes to legitimize political discourse and actions.⁶⁷⁴

The idea that populist politicians shape their rhetoric according to voters, especially during election periods, is clearly evident in Erdoğan's speeches. By exploiting domestic problems and linking them to foreign events, Erdoğan not only gains voter support, but also influences international relations and political psychology. His method emphasizes the relationship between domestic and foreign policy in contemporary political strategy, showing how the relationship between domestic policy appeal and international positioning can affect both national politics and international relations. Orbán not only gains support at home but also influences Hungary's foreign policy stance by emphasizing national sovereignty and portraying Hungary as a country where traditional values are protected from external influence. His strategy draws attention to the relationship between domestic political narratives and global positioning, demonstrating how populist leaders use perceived or real external threats to maintain their legitimacy and political dominance.

A key element of Erdoğan and Orbán's rhetoric is the personalization of the leadership with which they bind their states together. Populist politicians, who often present themselves as the sole defenders of national identity and sovereignty, frequently resort to this rhetorical device. Erdoğan's statement that his leadership is organically connected to the destiny of Türkiye, such that any divergent path would cause the country's breakdown, is a reflection of such a dynamic. A clear example of this leadership's personalization can be seen in his statement: "*Türkiye's destiny has become tied to that of the AKP. If we [AKP] stumble, Türkiye will be in trouble*".⁶⁷⁵ Likewise, Orbán positions himself as a vital leader required to safeguard Hungary's political, as well as cultural, cohesion. According to Csigó and Merkovity, Orbán has, by doing a "permanent revolution... in the name of the people" converted the state into an "illiberal regime", concentrating power in a fashion weakening checks and balances, while moving it toward centralization around his leadership.⁶⁷⁶ This personalization of power is also strengthened by Fidesz's presentation of itself as a "popular revolt", not just against external

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 97-99.

⁶⁷⁵ Turkish Minute, "President Erdoğan: Turkey's Destiny Tied to AKP's," September 6, 2017, <https://turkishminute.com/2017/09/06/president-erdogan-turkeys-destiny-tied-to-akps/>.

⁶⁷⁶ Péter Csigó and Norbert Merkovity, "Hungary: Home of Empty Populism," in *Populist Political Communication in Europe*, ed. Toril Aalberg et al. (London: Routledge, 2016), 299, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623016>.

forces, such as the EU, but against domestic elites, placing Orbán not merely as a political leader but as a guardian of the country's identity.⁶⁷⁷

Orbán frequently contrasts his own experience and determined leadership with what he perceives as weak, externally influenced opponents when criticizing opposition leaders and EU institutions.⁶⁷⁸ Erdoğan, in his criticism of at that time opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, emphasizes his extensive interaction with world leaders by contrasting the opposition's alleged inexperience abroad. Through portraying Brussels and liberal Western elites as enemies seeking to undermine Hungarian sovereignty, Orbán is bolstering his image as a leader determined to resist foreign intervention. His government's slogans, including "Stop Brussels", are aimed at strengthening national unity under his leadership, in line with Erdoğan's use of nationalist rhetoric to rally support. Erdoğan's message is further reinforced by the language of "one nation, one flag, one homeland", which emphasizes the unity of the country under his leadership.

The psychological mechanisms outlined in section 2.1, particularly the need for security and belonging, become most pronounced during election campaigns. Both Erdoğan and Orbán use emotionally charged crisis narratives to simultaneously mobilize fear and loyalty. This emotional dichotomy explains why rational economic or institutional arguments often fail to undermine populist support: voters respond to perceived emotional truth rather than empirical reasoning. Both leaders portray elections as vehicles for their continued existence, claiming that in scenarios where the opposition wins the elections, they will lead to cultural degradation, foreign domination, or national collapse. This discourse creates a constant sense of doom and gloom, thus ensuring sustained public support.

6.3. How do the Leaders Position Themselves in International Relations?

This part followed the sub-question *what is the role of populism and political psychology in foreign policy decision-making processes?* and in a summarizing way the answer was given. The idea that Erdoğan is a savior of all oppressed peoples is a recurring motif in his populist foreign policy discourse that distinguishes him from Orbán. Using the idea of the "ummah", Erdoğan presents himself as a defender of the broader Muslim world⁶⁷⁹; Orbán takes a similar

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 303.

⁶⁷⁸ Glied, "The Populist Phenomena", 40.

⁶⁷⁹ Ihsan Yilmaz and Nicholas Morieson, "The Impact of Civilizational Populism on Foreign and Transnational Policies: The Turkish Case," *Populism & Politics* (European Center for Populism Studies, 2023), 12, <https://doi.org/10.55271/pp0022>.

stance, but more limited, emphasizing the protection of “Christianity” and “Christians” in Europe.⁶⁸⁰ Erdoğan’s reference to the “ummah” and Orbán’s concept of the Christian community can be contrasted in this way, as both leaders present their leaderships as defending a transnational religious identity.

Erdoğan often accuses Western institutions and international organizations, such as the EU and UN, of being ineffective or biased against Türkiye.⁶⁸¹ Orbán’s rhetoric reflects a similar distrust of such large multinational organizations.⁶⁸² By depicting these institutions as the “external other” or “dangerous other”, both leaders use them to warn their countries of internal resistance that they claim is a product of these groups.⁶⁸³ Liberal principles that support the function of international organizations in resolving disputes and promoting cooperation stand in contrast to this pessimism.⁶⁸⁴ Voters who want to feel secure are more likely to support the current government and its leader because the rhetoric used by the leaders may make them concerned about their security.⁶⁸⁵ These organizations and their liberal member states criticize both countries for their foreign policy positions. However, such criticism reinforces the populist “us vs. them” divide in their language, which increases their electoral support rather than prompting these governments and leaders to reconsider their actions.⁶⁸⁶

The conscious use of foreign policy discourse not only affects domestic politics but also has broader implications for global affairs.⁶⁸⁷ In terms of international relations, populism should be addressed from various perspectives because the populist discourses of modern leaders resemble and interact with traditional international relations ideas. Populist discourse must be examined in a broader context that considers both internal political strategies and international dynamics to fully comprehend the complexities of modern global politics. This study has also demonstrated the importance of using CDA to construct and understand the political-psychological framework of populist rhetoric analysis.

⁶⁸⁰ Körösényi and Patkós, “Liberal and Illiberal Populism”, 327.

⁶⁸¹ Yilmaz and Morieson, “The Impact of Civilizational Populism”, 4.

⁶⁸² Körösényi and Patkós, “Liberal and Illiberal Populism”, 329.

⁶⁸³ Csehi and Zgut, ““We Won’t Let Brussels Dictate Us””, 58.

⁶⁸⁴ Andrew Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 516.

⁶⁸⁵ Kirk Waldroff, “Fear: A Powerful Motivator in Elections,” *American Psychological Association*, 2020, <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/fear-motivator-elections>.

⁶⁸⁶ Glied, “The Populist Phenomena”, 40.

⁶⁸⁷ Özyüksel, “Foreign Policy Decision-Making Processes”.

The link between foreign policy and national security, that is, the link between domestic security issues, especially terrorism, and international relations is another important dimension of Erdoğan's discourse. Erdoğan constantly claims that he is the only leader who can protect Türkiye from terrorist threats, and he uses this protection to support his domestic and foreign policies. By presenting terrorism as a threat that exists both domestically and internationally, he maintains a narrative that ties his leadership to the survival of the country.⁶⁸⁸ Similarly, Viktor Orbán's discourse, while focusing primarily on immigration, emphasized the link between external influence and security. Orbán sees immigration, especially from Muslim-majority countries, as a serious threat to Hungary's national security and cultural identity.⁶⁸⁹ In the context of EU refugee policy, Hungary's sovereignty is portrayed as under threat from external powers. In this context, Orbán and his administration see themselves as the country's leading protectors, justifying harsh measures at home while taking a defensive and sometimes hostile stance abroad.⁶⁹⁰ Both leaders thus reveal how populist tactics blur the lines between domestic and foreign policy, using national security discourses both to legitimize coercive or rebellious positions abroad and to strengthen their influence at home.

While both politicians use foreign policy to advance their own political agendas, their geopolitical stands and strategic partnerships differ. Erdoğan directly incorporates foreign policy into his populist rhetoric, repeatedly referring to Western double standards in international law and global governance. In his statements, he highlights the unfair treatment of Türkiye and portrays the West as a hypocritical force threatening his sovereignty.⁶⁹¹ On the other hand, even when he criticizes the EU, Orbán is more selective in his confrontations. He engages with Brussels skillfully, opposing measures that he believes violate Hungarian sovereignty and secure financial gains. Rather than rejecting Western liberalism outright, his rhetoric emphasizes resistance.⁶⁹²

When examining the religious-political discourses of both Erdoğan and Orbán, it can be seen that they combine nationalism with religious identity. In addition, as has been stated many times before, they portray themselves as the protectors of traditional values and national heritage. Erdoğan regularly uses the idea of the ummah or global Muslim community to present himself

⁶⁸⁸ Yilmaz and Morieson, "The Impact of Civilizational Populism", 4.

⁶⁸⁹ Glied, "The Populist Phenomena", 40.

⁶⁹⁰ Ákos Bocskor, "Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015," *Sociology* 52, no. 3 (2018): 564.

⁶⁹¹ Hazır, "Anti-Westernism in Turkey's Neo-Ottomanist Foreign Policy", 177.

⁶⁹² Visnovitz and Jenne, "Populist Argumentation in Foreign Policy", 694-96.

as the leader of Türkiye and oppressed Muslims everywhere. His rhetoric on Palestine, Syria, and the Muslim world, implying that Türkiye has a divine mandate to defend other Muslims, serves to further solidify his image as an Islamist populist.

In addition to these general trends, comparing the populisms of Orbán and Erdoğan reveals unique thematic focuses that align with the symbolic worlds in which their political narratives operate. While Orbán's anti-Soros campaign has become a central organizing myth in Hungary—a personification of the “globalist elite” that jeopardizes national sovereignty—the anti-Gülen discourse serves a structurally similar purpose in Türkiye, depicting an “enemy within” collaborating with external powers. Both characters function as useful enemies within their leaders' moral universes, acting as proxies for the broader “West vs. us” conflict. Similarly, the discourses surrounding jihadist terrorism and the Russo-Ukrainian War play similar roles in the foreign policy discourses of both countries: Erdoğan sees terrorism as a permanent justification for securitization and centralized power, while Orbán sees the war as proof of Hungary's moral independence from both East and West.⁶⁹³ Thematically, both populisms employ anti-Western sentiments and identity-building techniques; Erdoğan employs the rhetoric of “Pan-Turkic solidarity” and the “ummah”, while Orbán uses the language of “Christian Europe”. However, their geopolitical manifestations differ: Erdoğan's populism is expansionist and civilizationist⁶⁹⁴, while Orbán's remains defensive and Eurocentric.⁶⁹⁵ This thematic comparison demonstrates that moral polarization, marginalization, and identity projection are the same populist mechanisms, but with different symbolic references depending on the cultural and geopolitical context.

Identity and belief systems shape how leaders interpret the international arena. Erdoğan's emphasis on religious solidarity and Orbán's Christian civilizationist rhetoric demonstrate how an emotional attachment to collective identity can translate domestic populism into foreign policy. In this process, emotions such as pride and anxiety become diplomatic tools that link national narratives to international positioning. Orbán advocates a “Christian Europe” against secular liberalism and Muslim immigration, using Christianity as a cornerstone of Hungarian identity. He portrays Hungary as the last bastion of Christian civilization against “globalist”

⁶⁹³ Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 88–89.

⁶⁹⁴ Yilmaz and Morieson, “The Impact of Civilizational Populism”.; *Islamist Civilizational Politics and the AKP: Turkey's Role in a Changing Muslim World* (ISP Institute, 2025); “*The AKP's Foreign Policy as Populist Governance*”, MERIP, December 2018.

⁶⁹⁵ Bíró-Nagy, “Illiberal Democracy in Hungary”.

elites who seek to undermine national sovereignty. In light of all this, religion plays an important role in both discussions. However, there is an important distinction between them. Christianity is portrayed as a fundamental part of the imagined Hungarian identity in Orbán's speech. Conversely, due to the Ummah perspective mentioned above, Turkishness is a component of a larger Muslim identity in Erdoğan's discourse.

The Russo-Ukrainian War, which has spanned recent election cycles in both Türkiye and Hungary, should be considered when evaluating the foreign policy choices made by each nation and their positions in international relations. While Hungarians tend to view Russia as a serious threat due to historical trauma, Turkish people generally do not view Russia as a direct threat—in part because of the lack of Russian hegemonic ambitions over Türkiye during World War II, which was a result of the Turkish government's foreign policy decisions at the time. Each nation's foreign policy strategy and the language of its leaders on international security and alliances are affected by these differences in perception of danger. Both Erdoğan and Orbán maintain a practical connection with Russia while using anti-Western rhetoric to rally support domestically. Erdoğan has a complex but practical strategy for dealing with Russia. Although Türkiye remains a NATO member and interacts with Ukraine, he works with Putin on defense and energy related areas. The goal of strategic autonomy is evident in the balancing act between Russia and the West that prevents Türkiye from being fully on the same side as either group.⁶⁹⁶ Rather than taking a straightforward pro-Russian stance against Russia, Orbán has adopted a highly pragmatic, multi-layered approach. While he has repeatedly questioned EU sanctions against Moscow and expressed reservations about NATO's military expansion, these actions stemmed from a broader strategic logic known as the "Eastern Opening" (*Keleti Nyitás*) policy launched after 2012. Within this framework, the Hungarian government aimed to diversify its energy sources, attract Russian investment, and promote Hungary's image as a dominant actor pursuing a "balanced foreign policy" between East and West. Despite frequent criticism from the EU and Western partners, Orbán frames his ties with Vladimir Putin not as an ideological alignment, but as a pragmatic relationship that serves Hungary's economic security and national interests.⁶⁹⁷

Finally, it is essential to address the perspectives of both countries, one explicitly identifying as illiberal and the other exhibiting clear illiberal governance, toward international organizations,

⁶⁹⁶ Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Mustafa Kutlay, and E. Fuat Keyman, "Strategic Autonomy in Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Multipolarity: Lineages and Contradictions of an Idea," *International Politics* (2025): 1–22.

⁶⁹⁷ Visnovitz and Jenne, "Populist Argumentation in Foreign Policy", 694.

which are products of the liberal world order. Erdoğan has mixed attitudes towards international organizations. Until 2023, he had remained deeply skeptical of the United Nations, EU and Western alliances, but in 2023, he thanked foreign aid after the earthquake. His interactions with the EU, NATO and other organizations are transactional and driven by Türkiye's strategic goals rather than ideological disagreement. Orbán has consistently portrayed the EU as a foreign power threatening Hungary's independence. He uses Brussels as a scapegoat for domestic problems and aggressively opposes EU policy on immigration, LGBTQ+ rights and rule of law concerns while remaining in the EU for economic reasons. LGBT issues were also part of Erdoğan's campaign agenda. He accused opposition parties of supporting these "marginalized minority groups" and warned that if they came to power, they would turn the country in a direction that directly contradicted long-established traditional Turkish family values.

6.4. How is the Distinction Between Us and Them Created?

In this part, the questions *how are "us versus them" narratives built? Why are these important?* are summarily answered. Following the discussion in the theoretical part, as Bos et al. argue that populist communicators rely particularly on persuasive strategies in which social group cues become more salient, influencing people's judgments of political issues and political participation.⁶⁹⁸ This strategy is called "populist identity framing" because ordinary people are perceived as threatened by various outgroups within their own group.⁶⁹⁹ Orbán and Erdoğan also construct their populist discourses in this vein, making a distinction between us and them accordingly. According to Tajfel⁷⁰⁰, an external consensus regarding the existence of the group, a cognitive component (or membership knowledge) and an emotional investment in this component are necessary for the definition of any human group. When seen in the emotional involvement in the definition process, both the assignment of value outside oneself and the sense of security associated with the nation become important. The creation of an "us versus them" distinction, central to both leaders' rhetoric, reflects the psychological needs discussed in previous chapters. Fear and anger serve as emotional boundaries, separating the moral ingroup from the corrupt outgroup. This emotional construction of identity underpins the persistence of populism, transforming political opposition into an existential threat.

⁶⁹⁸ Bos et al., "The Effects of Populism as a Social Identity Frame".

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁰⁰ Henri Tajfel, "Social Identity and Intergroup Relations," in *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1–14.

The ways in which these leaders define and describe their countries are largely different from each other, although the analysis reveals parallels and similarities between the discourses, for example, in the construction of the us and them narratives and in the understanding of the pure people in the international context. In other words, even if they have some common features with populist discourses, they give different answers to the question “who is with us?” In short, when it is compared the definitions of “we” in the discourses, Erdoğan has a more religious and civilizationist line, while Orbán emphasizes the ethnocultural line, emphasizing his cultural ideals and including certain religious and civilizationist parts.

Erdoğan and Orbán describe their supporters as patriotic and pure, creating a parallel moral foundation in their populist rhetoric. Orbán portrays his followers as true patriots defending Hungary’s independence from foreign interference, while Erdoğan portrays them as brave and determined defenders of the nation. The tendency of both politicians to portray their opponents and the foreign countries they claim to support as dangerous “others” serves to further emphasize this moral divide. Rather than discussing those who did not vote for them, however, they frame the opposition and the foreign powers they claim to support as dangerous “others”, positioned as entities separate from the people, existing only to confuse and manipulate the people.

The creation of a binary opposition between “pure people” and “others”, a defining feature of populist politics, is a recurring theme in the campaign rhetoric of both Erdoğan and Orbán. Both presidents have portrayed opposition leaders as internal extensions of foreign enemies and presented themselves and their parties as legitimate representatives of their countries. In contrast, Erdoğan portrays the opposition as a society working with imperialist powers and claims that Türkiye’s sovereignty will be at risk if he leaves office. By portraying the opposition as a tool of external powers, particularly the EU and liberal intellectuals, Orbán is undermining Hungary’s sovereignty and traditional values. Both presidents promote the idea that their leadership is the only line of defense against both internal and external threats and that the future of their countries is at stake.

By presenting themselves as the sole defenders of real people and portraying opposition parties as either internal enemies or agents of foreign interests, both leaders exploit a binary division in society. Especially in light of the 2016 coup attempt and following elections, Erdoğan

portrays his opponents as sympathizers with terrorist groups and Western imperialists.⁷⁰¹ In general, his tone reinforces the idea that Türkiye's sovereignty is at risk by portraying Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and the opposition as collaborators with imperialist nations.⁷⁰² Similarly, Orbán characterizes his opponents as representatives of George Soros, Brussels, and the liberal elite, who oppose Hungarian national interests by advancing EU federalism, immigration, and diversity.⁷⁰³ His political message focuses on his anti-Soros rhetoric, portraying opposition leaders as “traitors” who have been deceived by external forces.⁷⁰⁴

CDA is a key method for examining how language creates and maintains systems of power and is useful for analyzing the populist speeches of both Erdoğan and Orbán. By focusing on the rhetoric of leaders, Erdoğan and Orbán appear to present their followers as morally correct, in contrast to the other who is often portrayed as internal or external enemies. This concept can be viewed within the framework of neoclassical realism as a way to strengthen the political legitimacy of leaders by promoting national unity in the face of perceived existential dangers. While poststructuralism allows for the exploration of power relations and the production of truths through language, constructivism takes this exploration further by emphasizing the importance of national narratives and shared identities in the construction of political discourse. According to political psychology, by appealing to innate anxieties and fears about sovereignty and national survival, this populist discourse significantly contributes to the formation of the nation's collective attitudes. Both leaders make emotional appeals to their followers and create an atmosphere of fear and unity that strengthens their power by emphasizing external threats and presenting problems as existential. From both theoretical perspectives, it is clear that both leaders used populist rhetoric to influence their countries' international reputations and maintain domestic authority.

In summary, both leaders have used populist governing techniques such as nationalism, establishing external enemies, creating crises, and strategic foreign policy; however, due to their geopolitical contexts and upbringings, their strategies differed. Unlike Erdoğan's expansionist

⁷⁰¹ Ece Toksabay and Nick Tattersall, “Erdoğan Says Turkey's Coup Script Was ‘Written Abroad’,” *Reuters*, August 2, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/erdogan-says-turkeys-coup-script-was-written-abroad-idUSKCN10D1NM>.

⁷⁰² Alec Luhn, “Exclusive: The Man Who Could Beat Erdoğan,” *TIME*, April 27, 2023, <https://time.com/6274645/exclusive-kemal-kilicdaroglu-turkey-election/>.

⁷⁰³ Glied, “The Populist Phenomena”, 38.

⁷⁰⁴ Griff Witte, “Once-Fringe Soros Conspiracy Theory Takes Center Stage in Hungarian Election,” *The Washington Post*, March 17, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/once-fringe-soros-conspiracy-theory-takes-center-stage-in-hungarian-election/2018/03/17/f0a1d5ac-2601-11e8-a227-fd2b009466bc_story.html.

and Islamist populism, which aims for world leadership, Orbán’s populism is defensive and Eurocentric, defending Hungarian sovereignty and traditional Christian values. The diversity of ways populism affects political psychology and international relations is illustrated by their different approaches to foreign policy and domestic strategies.

It would be useful to outline the comparison between the two leaders in a table. The table below summarizes the key differences and similarities between Erdoğan and Orbán’s populist strategies and highlights how their discourses and foreign policies are shaped by their historical, cultural and geopolitical contexts. In sum, both leaders use populism as a tool to consolidate power domestically and position their countries in a certain way on the global stage.

Table 4. Comparison of populism in Hungary and Türkiye

Aspect	Viktor Orbán (Hungary)	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Türkiye)
Historical Trajectory of Populism	Orbán’s populism increased significantly after the 2015 migration crisis.	The historical roots of populism in Türkiye are longer and are linked to the transition to multi-party life in the 20th century.
Populism Framework	Nationalism focused on defending Christian identity and European sovereignty.	Nationalism intertwined with Islamism positions Türkiye as the global defender of Muslims (ummah).
Core Narrative	National sovereignty framed around “Christian Europe” and anti-immigrant discourses.	Strong nationalist rhetoric that positions Erdoğan as the savior of the nation.
Foreign Policy Impact	Orbán uses populist rhetoric against EU influence and focuses on Hungary’s sovereignty and Christian identity.	Populism supports Erdoğan’s geopolitical goals and uses both domestic and foreign policies to consolidate power.
Use of Crisis in Rhetoric	The 2015 migration crisis and the Russia-Ukraine war to consolidate authority and challenge EU policies.	The 2016 coup attempt, and the 2023 earthquakes are considered as opportunities to strengthen the legitimacy of the leadership.
“Us versus Them” Rhetoric	Orbán portrays the opposition as agents of external powers such as George Soros and the EU and presents himself as a safeguard of Hungary.	Erdoğan portrays the opposition as collaborators of imperialist powers and presents himself as a defender of Turkish sovereignty.
National Identity Construction	National identity was framed through a “Christian-civilizational” narrative that emphasized cultural homogeneity, historical continuity, and protection from liberal-globalist influence.	National identity, closely tied to Islamic values and sovereignty, is a narrative about Türkiye’s rightful place in the global arena.

Leadership Personalization	Orbán personalizes leadership by framing himself as a defender of Hungary's cultural and political identity.	Erdoğan blurs the line between his leadership and the survival of the state, identifying his leadership with the future of Türkiye.
Relationship with the West	It opposes the EU's policies on immigration, LGBTQ+ rights and the rule of law, but maintains economic ties with the EU.	While criticizing the West's double standards, he also establishes pragmatic relationships.
Populism and Political Psychology	Orbán uses populism to strengthen his power domestically and resist external influences, exploiting fears of cultural and religious erosion.	By using national unity in response to external threats, populist discourse strategically appeals to fears of loss of sovereignty and national survival.

Source: Author's own editing

CONCLUSION

To begin with, this study aimed to position populism within the framework of international relations theories. In doing so, it was concluded that populism, as a concept with a weak ideological core, can carve out a place for itself within international relations alongside contemporary theoretical approaches. Additionally, the study highlighted the significant role of political psychology in understanding modern populist international relations. As discussed in this study, emotions, values, beliefs, and identities form the psychological foundations of populist international relations. Recognizing these elements has allowed this dissertation to interpret populism not merely as a communication strategy but also as a system of emotional management that bridges domestic and international politics.

While these concepts alone cannot provide a comprehensive explanation of current global developments, this dissertation proved that, when supported by a potent methodological approach—specifically, CDA—they offer valuable insights. Although many aspects of global politics provide further exploration, it is apparent that the global order shaping international relations is fundamentally structured around individuals, nation-states and their leaders, decision-makers, and within the context of increasing globalization, non-governmental organizations. Therefore, it is useful in reference to both the main research question and the title of this dissertation to examine the political psychology of populist international relations through the discourses of two populist governments and their approaches to foreign policy. This framework offers a proper perspective for understanding the trajectory of right-wing populism, which continues to advance, gaining momentum in contemporary global politics.

The study has shown how populist leaders such as Viktor Orbán and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan strategically use foreign policy discourse to strengthen their domestic political power and influence international opinion. By examining their speeches, especially during election periods when political mobilization is most successful, the study shows how both leaders created a divisive narrative that drew moral lines between “pure people” and “evil others” and often associated domestic opposition with foreign enemies. These discursive frameworks are not just language; they reflect deep-rooted psychological processes such as identity, anxiety, and sense of community. Returning to the emotional mechanisms outlined, the cases of Orbán and Erdoğan reveal how fear, anger, and moral superiority are systematically used to mobilize

national sentiments and maintain political authority. These emotions serve as tools that transform political narratives into collective experiences of belonging and threat.

The study combines political psychology with CDA and international relations theories such as poststructuralism, constructivism, and neoclassical realism to offer a multifaceted perspective on how populist leaders approach both domestic and international issues. Both leaders create narratives in which they present themselves as defenders of national sovereignty against a hostile outside world, despite the fact that Hungary and Türkiye have quite different historical, political and geographical positions. This confirms the theoretical claim that values and beliefs serve as interpretive filters through which societies perceive external threats. In both cases, these beliefs maintain the moral distinction between “us” and “them” and demonstrate how identity and emotional cognition shape international behavior. To appeal to the unique political and historical sensibilities of both nations, these narratives are supplemented by references to religion, culture and national identity.

Emphasizing the examples of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Türkiye and Viktor Orbán in Hungary, this dissertation examined how populist politicians use foreign policy discourse to mobilize people and retain political power during election periods. The research aimed to expand the knowledge of populism in international relations by adopting an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining constructivism, post-structuralism and neoclassical realism. The involvement of political psychology provided further insight into how leaders construct and control identity-based narratives to evoke strong emotions and reinforce the “us and them” divide. The results suggest that populist foreign policy is not an isolated area, but rather a well-planned extension of a broader populist logic that reframes national interests through emotionally and philosophically compelling narratives. This fusion of foreign policy and domestic political strategy is a sharp departure from traditional diplomacy and provides an important lens for understanding how populist governments have changed in the twenty-first century.

By focusing on specific election periods, it was possible to examine the change of populist discourse and the recontextualization of lasting themes such as identity formation, externalization of threats, and anti-Western sentiment across various elections. This approach treated populism not as a static set of ideas but as an evolving process of transformation. A thematic comparative approach focusing on specific symbolic clusters, such as pan-Turkish narratives, Islamist terrorism, or Soros/Gülen, could provide valuable insights. Consequently,

this study could be expanded in the future by combining thematic and chronological analyses to examine how populist discourse has evolved over time in response to internal and external factors. This allows researchers to examine how populist communication has changed over time and its impact on international legitimacy, identity politics, and politics.⁷⁰⁵

This study has offered a practical definition of populist foreign policy. It considers this approach as a strategic way of using rhetoric. This practice blends domestic political objectives, such as winning elections, with how a country positions itself on the world stage. All of this is evident in the case of Türkiye and Hungary. Populist foreign policy does not adhere to the usual rules of diplomacy. Instead, it transforms rhetoric into a storytelling tool. Leaders use rhetoric to deflect blame, build a national sense of self, and maintain a sense of ongoing crisis. Things like stirring up emotions are crucial here. Similarly, identifying external enemies that mirror internal enemies is crucial. Furthermore, foreign policy involves a form of personal loyalty to a single leader. Populist foreign policy aims to garner domestic support. It does this by reshaping the perspective on global ties. This perspective emerges through conflicting ideas, ambiguous rights and wrongs, and symbolic politics. The speeches of Erdoğan and Orbán demonstrate this in action.

In order to study how populist leaders use discursive methods, the study used CDA as the main methodological tool and also took into account aspects of political psychology. Drawing particularly on several publications by van Dijk⁷⁰⁶ and Chilton⁷⁰⁷, the speeches have highlighted the sociolinguistic aspects of discourse analysis, revealing how Orbán and Erdoğan shape “us versus them” narratives and how populism operates within the right-wing leadership of Türkiye and Hungary. Through the integration of political psychology, the study was able to trace how language encodes emotional and identity-based cues such as fear, pride, anger, and collective grievance, transforming discourse into political persuasion. According to the method chosen in CDA, the aim was to reveal the functioning of semantic networks and patterns in the discourses under consideration, rather than focusing on grammatical aspects and problems. The official campaign speeches of Orbán (2018, 2022) and Erdoğan (2018, 2023) served as the basis for the comparative studies. Most importantly, these statements were taken directly from official government and presidential websites to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the discourse

⁷⁰⁵ De Cleen and Stavrakakis, “Distinctions and Articulations”.

⁷⁰⁶ van Dijk, “Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis”.; van Dijk, “Discourse and Manipulation”.

⁷⁰⁷ Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse*.; Chilton, “The Straw Man in Political Discourse”.

under study. As a result, translation issues and interpretative biases were eliminated, and CDA could be applied more consistently and objectively.

The study's theoretical and methodological approach contributes to literature in another respect. The research highlights the emotional and symbolic components of populist leadership by critically analyzing the discourse through the lens of political psychology. This study demonstrates how populist leaders use carefully crafted narratives to manipulate political attitudes by appealing to pride, resentment, and fear, in contrast to most traditional approaches that only consider institutional or political variables. Such emotional mobilization is most evident during election periods, when populist rhetoric flourishes and leadership seeks to bolster its legitimacy and ensure electoral survival. The cyclical interaction between fear and anger allows populist leaders to maintain a constant sense of crisis. This mechanism functions as both a psychological and rhetorical strategy, resolving the central dilemma of this research: How do emotions support populist legitimacy in domestic and international arenas? As previously discussed, Erich Fromm's concept of authoritarian personality offers a useful psychological lens for understanding this phenomenon. The feelings of fear and uncertainty that Fromm identified as the primary drivers of people's attraction to authority lie at the heart of the contemporary populist appeal of leaders like Erdoğan and Orbán. In line with Fromm's insights in *Escape from Freedom*⁷⁰⁸, individuals facing alienation and social fragmentation often seek psychological security in powerful leaders who promise unity and order. Populist discourse exploits this emotional need by constructing polarized narratives of "us and them", offering belonging and identity in exchange for autonomy. These dynamics explain how populist leaders, particularly in times of crisis, can transform emotional distrust into political loyalty.

According to the study, both leaders frequently employ emotionally charged dichotomies such as "pure people" and "evil others", in which the "others" are often portrayed as domestic opposition supported by hostile external forces. Election periods, which are critical times for populist leaders to reaffirm their legitimacy and win over people, are when such narratives become most evident. Erdoğan's securitization of terrorism and Orbán's portrayal of migration as a danger to civilization are examples of how foreign policy discourse is reinterpreted for political purposes. Despite their different discursive approaches, both leaders develop overly

⁷⁰⁸ Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*.

simplistic worldviews that reduce complex global processes to existential dangers in order to protect their continued dominance.

This study highlights the under-researched connection between populism and political psychology in international relations. Understanding the psychological dimension of populist discourse – through identification, terror, and crisis framing – is crucial to understanding how these leaders play on the emotional demands of their supporters. The moral and emotional dimensions of populism explain why rational or institutional approaches alone cannot explain its durability. Emotions provide the connective tissue between ideology, leadership, and collective belief. Moreover, by situating the study within a foreign policy framework, the dissertation contributes to a growing body of work that recognizes the importance of combining international relations theory with discursive and psychological methods to fully understand the breadth of contemporary populism.

This dissertation has demonstrated that populist discourse is not merely a political tendency but also a structural necessity for populist leaders to maintain power, particularly in hybrid regimes where informal control and formal institutions coexist. Populist leaders regularly invoke threats, crises, and identity boundaries to foster emotional loyalty and fear-based commitment among their followers. These symbolic and emotional techniques create a narrative that presents the leader as the sole guardian of the nation's existence, delegitimizing dissent and restricting the space for dispute. Thus, populist rhetoric serves as a tool for political mobilization and power generation, increasing the leader's place both domestically and internationally.

In this dissertation it was argued that populist foreign policy should not be viewed merely as an aberration or disruption of the liberal international order. Instead, it should be viewed as a carefully constructed strategic discourse deeply embedded in both domestic political considerations and broader global identity issues. As populist leaders such as Erdoğan and Orbán continue to exert influence on international relations, future research should delve deeper into the various dimensions of populism. This involves not only examining power dynamics and institutional factors, but also analyzing how discourse, identity formation, and emotional appeals play an important role in shaping foreign policy decisions. Through highlighting the importance of political psychology and foreign policy in populist discourse, this dissertation brings a different perspective to the study of populism. It highlights the need to expand existing knowledge on populism to include broader geopolitical conditions and move beyond Eurocentrism. It also shows how populist politicians use the language of crisis and security to

advocate tough action, silence critics, and maintain power. Thus, the findings of this study not only provide insights into how populist leaders use foreign policy as a domestic tool for political mobilization but also expand the theoretical understanding of populist international relations.

Although this dissertation focused on the populist rhetoric of incumbent leaders during election periods, it deliberately excluded a detailed analysis of opposition parties and leaders in both Türkiye and Hungary in order to provide a focused analytical scope.

However, it does offer a valuable avenue for future research, especially in light of emerging political developments in both countries. Recent changes suggest that the winds of political change may be strengthening in Hungary and Türkiye and may create new dynamics that deserve academic attention. In the Turkish context, a particularly interesting development is the increasing importance of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Mayor of Istanbul, at the national level. Although he is not the official leader of any political party, İmamoğlu was presented as a presidential candidate for the 2028 elections by CHP and primaries were held for his candidacy, in which the public could participate. The emergence of such politicians outside of traditional party leadership structures raises significant concerns about voter psychology, political leadership, and the changing character of opposition discourse. Examining the components of populism in İmamoğlu's discourse, especially in terms of political psychology, can contribute to the literature. It would also be interesting to examine why a significant portion of the Turkish electorate continues to support populist politicians despite growing political and economic challenges. This would require further research into the symbolic roles that populist politicians play in the public imagination and the underlying psychological, cultural, and historical factors that influence voting behavior in Türkiye. To better understand how these dynamics have changed over time, such studies could use longitudinal discourse analysis, political psychology experiments, or public opinion surveys.

In the case of Hungary, it remains a valuable research topic to investigate whether the new immigration law and increasingly strict regulations that were introduced with a populist approach in 2024 will have any impact on voters in the 2026 elections. This can provide insight into which populist policies have the potential to succeed, and which have the opposite effect on the public, making it a fertile area to investigate the effectiveness of past populist political strategies.

In summary, both countries are experiencing developments that have the potential to affect not only their domestic politics but also their foreign policy and their positions in international relations. This highlights the need for further research linking political psychology and populism to better understand and predict what has happened, what is happening now, and what will happen in the world, both in the past and in the future. Ultimately, this thesis reaffirms that emotions, beliefs, and identities are not secondary but fundamental to understanding populist international relations. They resolve the research dilemma by demonstrating that political psychology is the missing bridge between populist discourse and international behavior.

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