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**The construction of America's crisis and the fear of loss:  
A study of Donald Trump's second presidential campaign in 2020**

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## Abstract

This study identifies the structure of populist rhetoric in Trump's second presidential election campaign in 2020. This is done through the combination of three key theoretical concepts: collective action frames; populist 'othering' based on vertical and horizontal dimensions; and framing of loss based on prospect theory. More specifically, the study explores the role of the framing of the 'enemy' in the motivational frame and the framing of 'the problem' in the diagnostic frame in relation to different forms of othering and the role of framing of 'loss' in Trump's rhetoric. The analysis shows that, Trump has used 'othering' to divide the society between 'us' 'the people' and 'them' 'the enemy' or 'problem'. The study further demonstrates that there are three outcomes of strategies that Trump has used in his speeches: 1) intersections or overlapping different types of othering; 2) blurring the lines between 'the enemy' and 'the problem' or 'the corrupted elites' and 'other' groups as well as the framing of losses; and 3) the losses has been framed as a catastrophic threat for the nations' values, economy and social security.

Keywords: populism; ethnic-nationalism; Trumpism; rhetoric; othering; mobilizing; loss

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the world has witnessed changes in the political landscape due to socio-economic shifts. One of the main political changes in Europe has been the rise of radical right-wing parties and their campaigns. The ascent of the radical right-wing parties in recent times has been linked to rhetoric based on populism, ethnic nationalism, and civilizationalism, where populists have framed themselves, and continue to do so, as representatives of the collective will of ‘the people’ that is working against a common enemy (Brubaker, 2017). This indicates the significance of framing values, beliefs, and meaning in mobilizing people for collective action (Snow & Benford, 1988, 1992).

The framing of values, beliefs, and meanings in mobilizing people for collective action was important for Donald Trump’s election as President of the United States of America in November 2016 (Brubaker, 2017; Homolar & Scholz, 2019). Several studies have highlighted the polarized and populist nature of Trump’s speeches in his presidential campaigns (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019; Rowland, 2019; Wright & Esses, 2019). An important study by Brubaker (2017) maintains that nationalist populist rhetoric has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. In the vertical dimension the rhetoric is directed and focused on defending ‘ordinary’ people against the ‘others’, in this case the corrupt elites, institutions, and the international community. The horizontal dimension focuses on people like ‘us’ and ‘outsiders’ or minorities who represent a problem and a threat. One can argue that Brubaker’s (2017) work operationalizes the framing of problems and enemies suggested by Snow and Benford (1992). Thus, an understanding of nationalist and populist action frames is important for advancing our knowledge, especially in the recent increase in polarized societies.

We also know from the literature that national populist rhetoric is built around different frames that stress different social threats. Technically these frames also identify potential losses for certain populations or people (Müller, 2016; Rowland, 2019). This was evident in Trump’s speeches where he actively constructed America ‘in a state of crisis’, which had an impact on voters’ sentiments in the 2016 presidential campaign (Homolar & Scholz, 2019, p. 348). However, existing literature does not consider the fact that individuals behave differently under uncertainty. Here it would be useful to draw on Levy (1992) as one of the main arguments of his work is that individuals tend to take decisions based on perceived outcomes of gains and losses and that individuals deal with losses differently from gains. Studies have confirmed people’s risk-averse tendencies towards gains and a risk-acceptance approach in case of a loss (Osmundsen & Petersen, 2020; Thaler, Tversky, Kahneman, & Schwartz, 1997; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992).

This study aims to further our understanding of the polarized rhetoric of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and how it is used for identifying problems and motivating collective action. In doing so, the study combines theoretical concepts to bridge the theorization of collective action frames, dimensions of the populist othering, and the framing of loss. I argue that focusing on Trump’s second presidential campaign in 2020 offers a critical setting of the national-populist rhetoric (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019; Homolar & Scholz, 2019; Inwood, 2019; Rowland, 2019) and the framing of loss in Trump’s rhetoric (Osmundsen & Petersen, 2020). In the second presidential campaign this rhetoric led to violent collective action when Trump’s supporters stormed the US Capitol.

## 1.1 Aim and research questions

This thesis is aimed at studying the framing of problems and enemies in relation to different forms of othering of migrants and elites versus the ‘people’ and the framing of ‘loss’ in Trump’s second presidential campaign. I draw on Snow and Benford (1992) conceptualization of collective action frames, Brubaker (2017) vertical and horizontal dimensions of populist othering and Levy (1992) framing of loss. The period of study is the second presidential campaign in 2020 in which the mobilization of Trump’s followers was evident, and which led to collective action in invading the US Capitol on 6 January 2021.

The two main research questions formulated for this study are:

- 1) How was diagnostic and motivational framing used for identifying the problems and enemies in Trump’s 2020 presidential campaign?
- 2) What role did ‘othering’ and ‘loss’ play across these frames intended to mobilize voters?

By asking these questions about Trump’s speeches during the second presidential campaign in 2020, this study found that frames identifying problems and offering motivation to vote may also be studied in relation to the vertical and horizontal dimensions identified by Brubaker (2017) – that is, the identification of ‘others’ vertically (with a focus on the betraying elites) and also of ‘others’ horizontally (with a focus on undeserving immigrants) and the role allocated to ‘loss’ with reference to these ‘others’ and to problems and motivations. In doing so, we gain a deeper understanding of the nature of framing problems and motivations in electoral campaigns and the integral role that both ethnic nationalism and populism play, thus helping to shed light on the centrality of the rhetoric of ‘others’ within and without (Brubaker, 2017; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992).

## 2. Previous Research

Weber’s seminal work focuses on three ideal forms of authority which he identified on the basis of 1) tradition authority, where legitimacy is derived from customs or it is handed down; 2) rational-legal authority, in which the leader’s authority is anchored in legitimacy through elections in a democratic regime or a rational society; and, 3) charismatic authority, where the legitimacy is derived from the people and the leader is seen as an exceptional person with extraordinary qualities (Breuilly, 2011). The third form of authority is the most relevant for this study.

A charismatic leader derives her or his power from the people who believe in her/his ability to reveal the truth about people’s social life. Some people are so enamoured by the leader’s personality that they do not question her/his decisions. Weber also suggests that a charismatic authority is usually transitory. In other words, any movement based on a charismatic leader is doomed to end because charismatic qualities cannot be inherited by another person. Thus, charismatic authority is temporary, and is transformed over time to the rational-legal stage (Dow Jr, 1969; Kenny, 2021; Mouzelis, 1985; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017). In this study, I link charismatic leaders to populism. Populist leaders seek to build authority by moving beyond or challenging the role of institutions as a strategic move for mobilizing voters.

Moving to the existing research on populism, the characteristics of European and American populism are associated with anti-immigration and anti-foreignism (Mudde & Kaltwasser,

2017). However, in Latin America, populism is associated more with clientelism and issues of economic mismanagement (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). These diverse characteristics have generated a debate on the meaning of populism, with multiple definitions of this phenomenon (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Populism has also been associated with the concept of ‘the people’, which in itself is a term that consists of multi-semantic concepts, such as the people as sovereign, common people, and the nation (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) argue that there are three definitions of populism: a core ideology; a complementary ideology; and a style. Rydgren (2017) discusses the definition of populism in three categories as 1) a broad ‘thick ideology; 2) a ‘thin ideology; and 3) a ‘discourse or style’. The ‘thick ideology’ or the ‘thick centre’ describes fascism, liberalism, and socialism as an ideology of harmonious and homogeneous people, which is based on nostalgia and a back-to-their-roots approach. The ‘thin ideology’ divides society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups – ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elites’ – and it needs another ideology as the host. Discourse or ‘style and performance’ are historically essential in the political field for achieving political goals by influencing the public. This is evident in populist right-wing rhetoric through a structured process to divide society between the ‘corrupt elites’ and ‘the people’ (Rydgren, 2017).

Rydgren (2017) suggests that ethnic nationalism’s messages influence the populist ideology. Moreover, populism is adopted as a discourse and style by ethnic nationalists. For example, radical right-wing parties claim that their policies and objectives are protecting the nation’s majority culture and maintaining ethnic homogeneity (Rydgren, 2017). Ethnic nationalist parties also unite around myths of their homogeneous race and common history threatened by ‘others’. This nostalgia for the past has been the axis of ethno-nationalist rhetoric in Europe for building an identity based on an imagined past and an imagined threat to ethnic homogeneity (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019).

Elgenius and Rydgren (2019) argue that the ethno-nationalist rhetoric in Europe exploits socio-economic issues to blame and link them with other issues, such as immigrants and refugees. This linkage has been used for different issues such as accusing immigrants of being the reason for job and housing crises and accusing immigrants of having a negative impact on the lifestyle ‘of the people’. Migrants are also linked to high crime rates; they are also portrayed as a threat to ethno-national identity and social insecurity, such as in an Islam civilization. The idea of a ‘golden age’ based on ethnicity is a way of inciting people against pluralism in society, which in turn paves the way for individual governance either through a populist leader or an ethnic group. This is similar to populist rhetoric that divides society between pure people or ‘the people’ and ‘others’, such as ‘corrupt elites’ or other ethnicities (Rydgren, 2017). This xenophobia and distinction from the ‘others’ is a common feature of the radical right-wing and populist discourse on mobilizing people and attracting voters (Rydgren, 2017). It is defined as a linguistic construction of communication either through speeches, texts, or images, which create meanings that structure social life in a relation of dominance and discrimination (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

In recent decades, ethno-national ideology has adopted the populist rhetoric for mobilizing people around its ideologies, such as nationalism and racism. This populist rhetoric has been ob-

served as incitement against the ‘others’ (Borras Jr, 2020). For example, in Europe the ‘*civilizational*’ rhetoric of ‘populist radical right-wing parties and movements’ (PRR) claims to protect the common history and homogeneous race against the ‘others’ who do not share the same race and history (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). This form of rhetoric has been adopted by parties such as the French Front National (FN) in France, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), and the Flemish Bloc/Flemish Interest (VB) in the Netherlands (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). Civilizational rhetoric has played a role in making the populist liberal terminology hybridized for inciting against the ‘others’ (Brubaker, 2017).

This was evident in the Brexit campaign in Europe and Trump’s election campaign in the United States (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017). In both these campaigns there was a marked escalation of rhetoric that incited people against elites and institutions and also incited people against foreigners and immigrants by portraying them as the reason for socio-economic problems (Bhambra, 2017). Bhambra (2017) also argues that populist rhetoric in both the Brexit and Trump’s election campaigns had common characteristics. For example, both were based on the past as ‘white’ nations and minorities of other races as outsiders who had gained advantages at the expense of ‘the people’. Therefore, the populist rhetoric in both Europe and the US claimed that it represented ‘the white audiences’ and populist leaders were defending ‘the people’ that had been ‘left behind’. These similarities in national populist rhetoric across the Atlantic provide valuable insights for a better understanding of the populist rhetoric in Trump’s campaign.

Notably, Trumpism is understood as a form of populist rhetoric and seems to be separate from the official Republican Party, thus containing some components that are key to radical right-wing populism (Brubaker, 2017). For example, the Trumpism rhetoric tends to be represented as the voice of the people, which defends and restores their plundered privileges from the ‘others’ in both vertical and horizontal dimensions to ‘*make America great again*’ through a negative attitude towards international principles and agreements (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1207; Ross & Caldwell, 2020). Ross and Caldwell (2020) argue that one of the main characteristics of the Trumpism rhetoric is the constant talk of political opponents in a negative way and holding them accountable for socio-economic issues. Bhambra (2017) adds that in both the Brexit and Trump’s 2020 presidency campaigns the rhetoric was framed to claim the need to defend the white working class and even the middle class to restore their rights, which had been taken by other ethnic minorities.

## **2.1 Trump’s rhetoric**

Populist leaders claim that they are the voice of ‘the people’, as indicated by Trump in his acceptance speech at the Republican Convention – ‘I am your voice’ (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1192). Trump’s rhetoric in the 2016 election campaign made it impossible for most of the commentators to predict the chances of his winning the elections and becoming the President of the United States of America (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019; Appel, 2018; Rowland, 2019). This attracted different streams of research including sociological research to explain the changes in politics and the behaviour of the voters following Trump’s first election campaign (Morgan, 2018). Perhaps one of the most interesting features of the United States case is the escalation in the incitement of Trumpism rhetoric. This offers the opportunity to further explore Trumpism as a

populist rhetoric in general and to examine the construction and the framing of loss in Trump's speeches. Tversky and Kahneman (1992) argue that individuals hate losing more than they like gaining; therefore, when they make a choice under the influence of uncertainty, they may choose a small, guaranteed benefit rather than a larger unsecure benefit.

Secondly, this case provides more insights into the role of how loss was constructed in Trump's speeches and how the framing of loss influenced the mobilization of people. For instance, we know that the national populist rhetoric was practised extensively in the case of Trumpism by inciting 'the people' against both the elites and immigrants from Latin America and Mexico. Similarly, the middle and working 'white' class was presented as the one that was left behind and most affected by socio-economic issues (Bhambra, 2017; Brubaker, 2017). Moreover, the incitement was geared towards the 'corrupt elites' and democratic institutions that were blamed for the socio-economic issues (Bhambra, 2017; Brubaker, 2017). It has also been observed that this rhetoric is based on public fear and resentment of outsiders, or dissidents in the 'elites' case (Hawkins et al., 2019).

Wright and Esses (2019) investigated voters' perceptions associated with different risks in relation to immigrants, such as security risks, economic risks, cultural risks, and the social domination of immigrants. They found that perceptions of security risks were the main aspect that increased Trump's votes. Economic risks were mainly an issue among Liberal voters. Their study could not find evidence to support cultural and social risks as predictors for motivating voters in the 2016 presidential elections. This confirms the findings of other studies that discuss issues and attitudes that framed national security with immigration which had the power to shape public opinion and behaviour (Lahav & Courtemanche, 2012; Reny, Collingwood, & Valenzuela, 2019; Rydgren, 2008). However, this also contradicts other studies that argue that the rise of nationalist populism is mainly due to perceptions of a cultural loss (Rowland, 2019).

Nationalist populism rhetoric works best when there is a general perception among the people of a potential threat that will undermine the existence of their society, since it is centred around practices that 'blame for loss' and show 'hatred of a common foe' with a charismatic outsider persona, which in America's case promised to return America to glorious times (Rowland, 2019, p. 346). Second, it paved the way for a hero to save them and take them back to their heroic past. This hero is not an ordinary person, but claims he is the only one who could do what the people wanted and could thus represent and talk on behalf of the people (Müller, 2016). Third, it solidified Trump's supporters' group identity as the real Americans who were oppressed by the elites and 'others' (Rowland, 2019). Thus, nationalist populism was centred 'around feelings of fear and anger about loss of status' (Rowland, 2019, p. 354).

While Trump's successful play of potential loss shocked political observers, different fields have a long research line that focuses on loss as a key psychological driver for risky decisions (Osmundsen & Petersen, 2020). Given the central aspect of a perceived loss, different studies have shifted the attention to the framing of losses/gains (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017; Mutz, 2018; Osmundsen & Petersen, 2020).

Osmundsen and Petersen (2020) differentiated between situations that require personal (self-regarding) decisions and those that require political (others-regarding) decisions. They found that individuals reacted differently to framing effects depending on their need levels. Some

could have low needs since they possess important resources, while others could have high needs with limited resources. This difference in needs shapes how people respond to losses and gains. These authors provide an example of food scarcity, which may be an issue for everyone in society. However, it triggers a stronger sense of unease amongst those who are already on the verge of starvation. The group that has a high personal need for food will be more willing to take risks to avoid losses. However, when the loss is about others' loss, those who experience a high need will no longer be willing to take risks. In situations like these it is those with a low need who attempt to safeguard their losses to secure their status quo and social survival (Osmundsen & Petersen, 2020).

A related but different study argues that those who were left behind after the recovery from the financial crisis in 2008 were the ones who voted for Trump due to their 'perceived status threat among high-status group' (Mutz, 2018). These types of frames that focus on threats not only increase the need for maintaining the status quo and reinforce hierarchical social and political arrangements but they also trigger the need to protect the dominant group and increase outgroup negativity (Mutz, 2018).

Mutz (2018) argues that two main threats to group status have played an important role in the recent past. The first is in relation to reports indicating that minority groups in America will supersede the number of whites since Europeans took the land from the indigenous people. The second is the threat of a loss of US global hegemony, which has spurred a threat from China and India mainly in job losses in America and the creation of jobs abroad (Inwood, 2019; Mutz, 2018). Like others, Mutz (2018) and (Inwood, 2019), argue that because the most prototypical American is represented by a white Christian male, Americans respond to a threat to their racial status and a threat to America's global status (Mutz, 2018).

What these studies suggest is that Trump's speeches 'tapped into the alienation and sense of lost opportunities so common among white working class to create a sense of solidarity and support for the charismatic outsider' (Rowland, 2019, p. 349). Other studies indicate that Trump 'tapped into a much longer history of white supremacy' (Inwood, 2019, p. 580). Inwood (2019, p. 582) suggests that the perception of African Americans or any other group gaining civic and economic rights is framed as social development at the 'expense of the whites'. In other words, the racialized logic of the white race versus other ethnicities and how they threaten their culture makes most of the nationals strangers in their own land (Bhambra, 2017).

This racist rhetoric was legislated by claiming to defend the rights of the majority white working class whose privileges were taken away by outsiders of other races (Bhambra, 2017). Gökarıksel and Smith (2017) argue that Trump's slogan 'to make America great again' signals an agenda that would reverse the gains made by women, non-whites, immigrants, Muslims, and LGBTQ activists. The social progress made by minority groups reinforced the sense of loss for the 'white' working class since its dominant social position was being threatened (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019). This sense of fear enabled Trump to exploit these existing divides between 'us' as the 'real' Americans versus the 'elites' and 'others' and gave his supporters the space to express their resentment of the 'others', even if the expression was communicated in violent ways as was the case at some of the rallies (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019).

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study combines the insights of three key theoretical concepts: Snow and Benford (1992) collective action frames, such as diagnostic and motivational frames, which are useful in gaining voter support through carefully crafted messages; vertical and horizontal dimensions of populism making distinctions between ‘the people’ ‘the elites’ and migrants or minority groups (Brubaker, 2017); and, the framing of loss (Levy, 1992) or frames that specifically identify loss.

First, according to Snow and Benford (1992, p. 137), a collective action frame ‘refers to an interpretive schema that simplifies and condenses the “world out there” by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events experiences and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment’. According to Snow and Benford (1992) three frames are relevant: (1) a diagnostic frame, highlighting problems such as immigration – for example, Mexican immigrants being the cause of different social and political problems that ‘the people’ are facing; (2) a motivational or populist frame which ‘others’ the elites and the international community as enemies and justifies for voters the need not to vote for the elites; and, (3) a prognostic frame, which offers a solution in voting for Trump and his policies, such as building a wall along the Mexican border.

This paper focuses only on the diagnostic and motivational frames with reference to the identification of problems and enemies. All the frames are able to link economic, political, and social issues to people’s fears and incite them against elites, migrants, and ethnic minorities (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019). In other words, the frame theory uses ‘framing’ to understand the communication process that is set in motion for creating certain perceptions about a particular issue (Nisbet, 2009). An issue might have several interpretations depending on the storyline crafted (Chong & Druckman, 2007). For example, determining an individual’s thinking about a hate group’s meetings depends on the ‘frame in thought’, whether the frame is freedom of speech or public safety (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Elgenius and Rydgren (2019) suggest that the frame theory enables and helps understand how parties shape their images and frame an interpretation of the world that will influence voters.

Second, Brubaker (2017) refers to the divisions created in society through populist discourse, that is, ‘us the people’ and ‘them’, represented in vertical and horizontal dimensions of populism (populist othering). The vertical refers to practices such as incitement against ‘corrupt elites’ and institutions. The horizontal dimension is incitement against the ‘others’ who do not share an imagined history (Brubaker, 2017). I argue that by adopting the vertical and horizontal dimensions suggested by Brubaker (2017) I am better equipped to analyse the content of framing messages against both elites and the institutions as well as the other people who are not considered ‘us’.

Third, the framing of loss can be understood through the lens of the prospect theory, which is a leading theory used for understanding decision-making under risk (Levy, 1992). This theory suggests that individuals tend to take decisions based on perceived outcomes of gains and losses (Levy, 1992). What is insightful from this theoretical perspective is that individuals deal with losses differently from the way they deal with gains. Studies confirm people’s risk-averse tendencies for gains and a risk-acceptance approach in case of a loss. Individuals follow a two-

step approach in taking decisions – framing, and evaluation of the outcome. At the framing level, the decision-makers frame the objectives and then evaluate the possibilities of making a choice (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). During an uncertainty, individuals tend to be more risk-averse since they dislike losing more than they like winning. In other words, based on the probable chances of winning or losing, individuals like to accept guaranteed gains (*'certainty effect for gains'*) (Rossiter, 2019, p. 399) rather than accepting the possible chance of unguaranteed gains (losing) *'possibility effect for losses'* (Rossiter, 2019, p. 399).

According to Homolar and Scholz (2019) fuelling people's emotional concerns through repeatedly framing messages, such as showing Trump having gains where he represented, for example, 'the strong man', or where the 'only solution' was a better alternative to unguaranteed gains such as a loss of historic earnings.

Hence, applying the frame theory and more specifically the framing of problems and enemies to mobilize the electorate to vote for Trump, and combining these theoretical concepts with populist othering and the framing of loss, enables a better understanding of how frames are constructed and structured with reference to 'us' and 'them' and loss in Trump's campaign speeches and how he mobilized the voters for his second campaign. These frames contain information about 'us' and 'them' conceptualized by Brubaker's vertical and horizontal dimensions of populism and othering.

#### **4. Methodology**

A qualitative inductive methodology was found to be the most suitable for addressing the research questions of this study (Charmaz, 2014). The analysis was carried out using theoretical coding as a useful analytical tool for organizing codes and forming a theoretical framework (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

##### **4.1 Empirical material and data collection**

Given that this study is interested in the framing content for a better understanding of the framing that was used for mobilizing voters, the empirical material focused on Trump's second election campaign in 2020, more specifically on Trump's speeches delivered between two critical incidents that were characterized by a vivid and clear polarization of the people. The first was in relation to the death of George Floyd on 25 May 2020, which brought to the fore structural racism that characterizes American society (Onwuachi-Willig, 2021). By focusing on Trump's speech in response to this incident, I was able to understand how Trump framed the incident for his supporters. The second incident is the storming of the US Capitol by Trump's supporters on 6 January 2021. The period between these two escalating protests resulted in 23 speeches (see Table 1). I argue that examining Trump's speeches at this time may offer a good opportunity to examine his rhetoric, which might be more visible as populist rhetoric. Also, it is a good opportunity to focus on Trump's key speeches, which are based on dividing society through 'us' and 'them', in both vertical/horizontal dimensions and by examining the loss frame in Trumpism's rhetoric.

Hence, the empirical material collected for this research is a critical sampling of Trump's key speeches. The empirical material consists of transcript speeches collected from (Rev website, 2021) in text form from 1 June 2020 to 7 January 2021. A test was done to ensure that the

transcripts matched Trump's speeches by listening to speech recordings available on YouTube. Table 1 gives a sample of Trump's speeches during the second election campaign, which are used for the analysis in this study.

**Table 1. List of speeches analysed**

No.	Title	Location	Length	Date
1	Trump's speech after George Floyd's death	Rose Garden	05:25	1 June 2020
2	Trump's speech at the Turning Point USA Students' Organization	Phoenix, AZ	01:31:52	23 June 2020
3	Trump's Mount Rushmore speech	Mt Rushmore in South Dakota	42:23	3 July 2020
4	Trump's speech at the Salute to America event	The White House	29:37	4 July 2020
5	Trump's speech about rolling back environmental regulations	The White House	44:18	16 July 2020
6	Trump spoke to the press at the airport in Cleveland	Ohio Airport	11:02	6 August 2020
7	Trump spoke at a New York Cops for Trump event	At NYPD	45:15	14 August 2020
8	Trump's speech discussed the 2020 elections, the economy, immigration, and energy independence	Mankato, Minnesota	01:01:07	17 August 2020
9	Trump's speech about immigration and the presidential election	Yuma, Arizona	42:29	18 August 2020
10	Trump's 2020 Republican National Convention (RNC) speech	Charlotte, North Carolina Washington, D.C.	01:12:09	27 August 2020
11	Trump's campaign rally speech	Latrobe, Pennsylvania	01:37:42	3 September 2020
12	Trump held a campaign event in which he delivered a speech attacking Joe Biden and Kamala Harris	Winston-Salem, NC	01:15:23	8 September 2020
13	Trump held a campaign rally	Freeland, Michigan	01:24:56	10 September 2020
14	Trump held a campaign rally. It was his first entirely indoor campaign rally in almost three months	Henderson, NV	01:07:24	13 September 2020
15	Trump held a campaign rally	Mosinee, Wisconsin	01:34:53	17 September 2020
16	Trump held a campaign rally, the first since he was diagnosed as being COVID-19 positive	Sanford, Florida	01:00:51	12 October 2020

17	Trump's speech at a Supporting the American Way of Life rally	Muskegon, Michigan	01:28:47	17 October 2020
18	Trump held a campaign rally	Goodyear, Arizona	01:05:24	28 October 2020
19	Trump held a campaign rally	Dubuque, Iowa	01:14:20	1 November 2020
20	Trump's rally speech at Grand Rapids	Michigan	02:33:04	2 November 2020
21	Trump's rally speech	Fayetteville, North Carolina	01:11:34	2 November 2020
22	Trump and Vice President Mike Pence delivered speeches on election night	The White House	09:51	4 November 2020
23	Trump's rally speech Save America	Washington, D.C.	01:13:19	6 January 2021

## 4.2 Data analysis

Identifying themes in qualitative research is a fundamental process (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). However, it is not an easy process since themes and patterns are sometimes explicit and at other times the themes might be ambiguous (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). A thematic analysis offers a researcher the possibility of capturing the patterns of meaning (themes) in the data; these themes relate to important issues in the research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Sociologists follow steps and techniques for identifying the themes in qualitative data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

In this study, I adopt Ryan and Bernard's (2003) four steps of the theoretical coding strategy: identifying themes and subthemes; selecting the most important themes; classifying, and organizing the themes; and linking them to the theoretical models. These steps and techniques were useful in identifying the important themes in analysing Trump's speeches. For instance, I started the analysis by reading transcribed speeches that were found on the (Rev) website. To ensure that these speeches were accurately transcribed, I listened and tested different recorded speeches delivered by Trump and compared them to the transcripts. For the actual analysis, I used a line-by-line technique and highlighted the themes and phrases that emerged in the data using colour coding (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

I found some clear patterns in the empirical material, such as the construction of crises, 'us' and 'them', 'the problem', or the 'corrupt political opponents', 'corrupt media', 'corrupt institutions', and different types of threats and losses. Each of these themes had several subthemes. For example, losses could be in relation to a loss of values, identity, unity, traditional lifestyle of the nation, financial loss, and nationhood or homogeneity in the country. After identifying the patterns and themes, I classified and organized the themes under conceptual labels for the event or the phenomenon. These concepts were classified by importance. These themes included but were not limited to diagnostic and motivational frames with specific reference to populist othering in both vertical and horizontal dimensions of populism, and the framing of

loss. For example, for the framing of loss I reduced the number of frames to five main losses consistently framed in Trump's speeches: (1) the framing of loss in relation to values and identity; (2) the framing of loss in relation to financial threat; (3) the framing of loss in relation to social security; (4) framing doom was embedded in all of these frames of loss, which represents the motivational frame; and (5) framing global and broad policies as a threat at the individual level.

According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), a researcher should be mindful of excessively focusing on finding themes that relate to the theory so that he/she does not ignore or miss other important themes. They also stress the importance of avoiding linking the theory and research questions in a way that disturbs the analysis findings. One possible approach for avoiding this is a coding process through the lens of theory by being sensitive to conditions, actions, and interactions. Being sensitive to these aspects enabled me to observe how Trump was skilful in blurring the lines between different theoretical concepts that have been treated as distinct in literature. For instance, Snow and Benford (1992) conceptualized diagnostic and motivational frames as distinct frames. However, I found that Trump blurred the lines between these frames. Brubaker (2017) discusses the vertical and horizontal dimensions as two distinct dimensions but I found that Trump was not only collapsing and blurring the lines between these two concepts, but he used what I refer to as 'the intersection of othering'.

The analysis and the themes also show how the themes of diagnostic framing emerged within the horizontal othering, such as migrants and other minority groups. In other words, these groups represented the problem and were blamed for an increase in crimes, a decrease in jobs opportunities for 'the people', and how they were harming society's homogeneity. For example, a speech delivered by Trump on 12 January 2020 in which he talked about the waves of immigrants and framed them as a potential threat to national security, public safety, loss of job opportunities, and a threat to public health system:

*If our border security measures are reversed, it will trigger a tidal wave of illegal immigration, a wave like you've never seen before... This will be an unmitigated calamity for national security, public safety, and public health. It would destroy millions and millions of jobs and claim thousands of innocent lives* (Trump, January 2021).

Paying attention to the interaction of theoretical concepts in quotes like these, I found that the immigrants represented the diagnostic frame which was 'the problem', but at the same time the immigrants were the 'others', which corresponds to the 'enemy' or 'corrupt elite' such as Senator Elizabeth Warren. In addition, this group of people was framed to be a threat and the reason for 'ordinary American citizens' losses. Similarly, I was able to identify themes that showed how Trump justified the mobilization of people through motivational framing within the vertical othering and framed them as 'the enemies'. For example, leaving the Paris agreement represents internal and external elites and it was necessary to leave the agreement to protect and create jobs for the American people.

In the following section, I discuss the key themes in Trump's speeches by discussing the blurred nature of the themes in diagnostic and motivational framing, blurring the lines of othering in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions, and the blurriness found between the different frames of loss. I also discuss what I refer to as the intersection of othering (different layers of othering).

## 5. The Framing of Problems in Trump's Presidential Campaign

The analysis shows that Trumpism was structured according to diagnostic and motivational frames identifying problems and enemies, also by drawing on othering and the loss frame. Thus, this analysis demonstrates the importance of the populist othering of 'us' and 'them' horizontally (migrants) and vertically (elites) and how othering is tied to the imagined ethnic homogeneity of a nation of 'white natives'. Moreover, the analysis identifies the key role of framing loss, that is, loss was observed as a dynamic variable of the populist rhetoric used to stress a loss of values, social security, and financial loss. Significantly, the study found a blurring and overlapping of diagnostic and motivational framing, othering and losses, which contributes to explaining the mobilizing potential of Trump's rhetoric.

The material analyses was done according to the diagnostic and motivational frames and the conceptualization of populist othering in the vertical and horizontal dimensions and loss across these frames. I argue that the importance of understanding the framing of problems, enemies, othering, and losses is essential to the polarizing rhetoric of Trump's second presidential campaign. I discuss this under the following themes: problems and enemies, othering, combining othering, the framing loss, and the blurring of these frames.

### 5.1 Collective action frames – problems and enemies

Collective action frames serve as a tool for reformulating the challenges that societies are going through by highlighting some social issues as unjust and immoral; this is the diagnostic frame. In the motivational frame, the 'enemy' in my study played the role of motivating people to act against the 'enemy' (Snow & Benford, 1992).

It was evident in Trump's speeches that he framed several 'problems', such as socio-economic challenges, as not only unjust but he also framed them as a threat of loss.

This can be seen in the following quote in which Trump framed refugees as the problem by framing them as causing the border security problem, which affected the security of the society. Immigrants were also framed as terrorists since they came from war zones. Trump also framed immigrants as leading to a crisis of unemployment by taking jobs from 'the people':

*Not only does Joe Biden want to eliminate your jobs, he wants to eliminate your borders. He's promised to flood your state with refugees. You know that as well as I do. You see it all the time. From terrorist hotspots around the world, including Syria, Somalia, and Yemen, Biden's pledged to have a 700% increase. He made this deal with crazy Bernie, a 700% increase in the flow of refugees. So, he wants to lift it up by 700%. This is in their manifesto. (Trump, 10 September 2020)*

In relation to framing the enemy, we can observe in the above quote that Trump framed Biden as the 'enemy' as a motive to 'the people' to act against the enemy. By framing Biden as the 'enemy' who was working against 'the people's' interests: *he's promised to flood your state with refugees*, and by doing so, he will *eliminate your jobs* and he will *eliminate your borders*,

Trump provides the motive to ‘the people’ to act against Biden, thus mobilizing ‘the people’ to vote for Trump.

### 5.1.1 Othering – Migrants and elites and intersections

Populist rhetoric relies on dividing the society, between ‘us’ and ‘them’, where ‘us’ represents ‘the people’ and ‘them’ could be the ‘corrupt elites’ in the vertical othering or ‘immigration’ in the horizontal othering (Brubaker, 2017). In his speeches Trump divided the society between ‘us’, the real people and them, the ‘outsider’. In his speeches, Trump framed Biden and other political opponents as the ‘corrupt elites’ who were working against ‘the people’s’ interests. The ‘corrupt elites’ were framed in Trump’s speeches as the other in the vertical dimension. He framed them as living in their own social circle away from ‘the people’ – for example, *they eliminate school choice while they enrol their children into the finest private schools in the land.*

*Joe Biden is weak. He takes his marching orders from liberal hypocrites who drive their cities into the ground while fleeing from the scene of the wreckage. The same liberals want to eliminate school choice while they enrol their children into the finest private schools in the land. They want to open our borders while living in walled-off compounds and communities and the best neighbourhoods in the world. They want to defund the police while they have armed guards for themselves. This November, we must turn the page forever on this failed political class.*  
(Trump, 27 August 2020)

In this quote we can also see how Trump framed his political opponents’ policies for immigrants as a social security threat to the borders and ‘the people’. while the political opponents were *living in walled-off compounds and communities and the best neighbourhoods.*

Trump framed the political opponents as the ‘other’ who are living in their own community with their privileges therefore they do not belong to ‘us’.

In the following quote, the ‘other’ was framed as the ‘corrupt elites’ and their policies a terrible threat against ‘the people’s’ interests. This kind of populist othering was identified in Trump’s speeches where he framed ‘us’ as the ‘left behind’. Therefore, it is a motive to not vote for ‘them’:

*We will have people coming into our country that never even thought of it before. You get free education, you get free healthcare, why wouldn’t they come? Let’s go to America. The Biden plan would unleash a flood of illegal immigration like the world has never seen. It’s crazy. Biden’s plan is the most radical, extreme, reckless, dangerous, and deadly immigration plan ever put forward by a major party candidate. It must be defeated, and it will be defeated on November 3rd.* (Trump, 18 August 2020)

In relation to immigrants, Trump framed them as groups that drain the country’s sources, such as its education and health systems. Moreover, they have been framed as criminal groups that threaten social security. By creating this division, ‘the people’ were mobilized against the ‘outsider’ and vote for Trump.

### 5.1.2 Intersections and the combining of othering

As mentioned earlier, in addition to dividing society between ‘us’ and ‘them’, whether it is the elites or immigrants, as populist othering, Trump used another important strategy which I refer to as the intersection of othering. Trump not only used names to ridicule his opponents in an effort to denigrate them, but it was also a strategy to hit his opponents by referring and combining different forms of othering. For instance, it was common in Trump’s speeches to ridicule US senator Elizabeth Warren, who was nicknamed ‘*Pocahontas*’. Trump used this nickname to discredit Elizabeth Warren’s claims to her native American heritage. By giving her such a nickname, the othering was amplified by not targeting Elizabeth Warren as a ‘corrupt elite’ in the ‘vertical dimension only’, but ‘othering’ her as a woman and a native who was not the ‘real people’ in the eyes of the populists, which is in the ‘horizontal dimension’.

I refer to this polarizing rhetoric as the ‘intersection of othering’. I argue that using the intersection of othering, the ‘corrupt elites’, or the targeted groups or person in this case, are hit much harder.

In the following quote there are several framings of ‘othering’. Trump mocked more than one political opponent in this small quote by calling them names, *sleepy Joe Biden*, *crazy people radical left people*, *crazy Bernie*, and by calling Elizabeth Warren *Pocahontas*. In this quote, Trump framed different forms of ‘others’ for example, in the vertical dimension *sleepy Biden* is meant to mean that he is unfit to lead the country and he is a *corrupted elite*. Hence, Biden is framed as unfit to lead the people. Biden was also framed as someone who held a left-wing or was controlled by left-wing ideology, which is another form of othering:

*Sleepy Joe Biden has vowed to abolish and eradicate the American oil and natural gas industries, and he’s pledged to ban fracking. And you saw that. For a year, more than that, he’d get onstage with all these crazy people, radical left people, and they were screaming who could ban it faster. He would say, ‘Yes, I’d been fracking. I am totally against fracking.’ For a year, ‘I am against fracking.’ I could play 100 clips. See the board? Where is the board. I spent a lot of money for that today. He’s going, for a year, ‘I am against fracking.’ Then he lucks out because Elizabeth Pocahontas Warren doesn’t get out, so she takes votes away from crazy Bernie, right? On Super Tuesday. And he loses by a little bit on each state, and Bernie loses again. This poor guy. Crazy Bernie. But he’s running again in four years. Don’t worry about it. (Trump, 2 November 2020)*

The same approach of intersecting the othering was used when Trump referred to Kamala Harris as the corrupted elite, Indian, and woman by referring to her beauty rather than her political and professional status, achievements, and wealth of expertise. I argue that in framing political opponents by several layers of ‘othering’, the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ became deeper and therefore the motivational frame became more effective. Labelling political opponents with several layers of ‘othering’ made the motivational frame stronger to show political opponents as ‘the enemy’ and ‘corrupt elites’ who were working against ‘the people’s’ interests, as seen in this quote:

*If Sleepy Joe Biden were to become president, he would immediately pass legislation to cut every single police department in America. (Trump, 14 August 2020)*

By doing overlapping of ‘othering’, the framing of ‘others’ became stronger, and enabled Trump to mobilize ‘the people’.

### **5.1.3 Framing of values, social security, wealth loss, and apocalyptic loss**

#### **a) Framing of values loss**

The fear of loss plays an important role in individuals’ choices, as individuals hate losing more than they like winning (Levy, 1992). In his speeches, Trump raised fears of loss in various ways and in more than one field. For instance, fears of the loss of cultural values were framed in ‘civilizational terms’ rather than narrow national principles directed against ethnic minorities and immigrants (Brubaker, 2017; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019).

*No movement that seeks to dismantle these treasured American legacies can possibly have a love of America at its heart. Can’t happen. No person who remains quiet at the destruction of this resplendent heritage can possibly lead us to a better future. The radical ideology attacking our country advances under the banner of social justice, but in truth, it would demolish both justice and society. It would transform justice into an instrument of division and vengeance, and it would turn our free and inclusive society into a place of a repression, domination, and exclusion. They want to silence us, but we will not be silenced. (Trump, 3 July 2020)*

Trump framed the protesters as a group with a different ideology as ‘them’, seeking to *dismantle these treasured American legacies*, and all the values of the American people, such as freedom and justice. Through framing the ‘others’ as a threat to ‘the people’s’ values, we can observe how Trump incited ‘the people’ to act against this threat were he state *no person who remains quiet at the destruction of this resplendent heritage can possibly lead us to a better future*. By doing so, Trump mobilized ‘the people’ to vote for him to avoid losing their values.

#### **b) Framing of social security loss**

People hate a risky loss and fear of losing social security is directly linked to an individual’s security so people tend to focus more on avoiding a loss than looking at gains (Osmundsen & Petersen, 2020).

In the following quote, we observe how Trump framed immigration policies of opponents as not only not being in the interest of the people but also being a threat to social security:

*My opponent’s immigration plan is the most extreme proposal ever put forward. Biden’s plan would eliminate U.S. borders by implementing nationwide catch, they want nationwide catch and release. You know what catch and release is? You catch them, take their name. They could be murderers, rapists, and then you release them into our country. (Trump, 19 October 2020)*

The quote shows how trump framed the immigrants as *murderers* and criminals, which is a threat to social security. By doing so, the individuals try to avoid the loss by voting for Trump.

### c) Framing of economic loss

In the following quote, Trump framed his opponents as ‘the enemy’ and ‘corrupted elites’, as they are working against ‘the people’s’ interests. Trump framed his opponents’ policies as a disaster for the national economy and therefore there is a threat to job opportunities:

*They want to eliminate carbon from the U.S. energy industry, which means abolishing all American oil, clean coal and natural gas. No coal, no gas, no oil, nothing to fire our massive plants. The result of this federally mandated shut down would be the wholesale destruction of the entire energy industry and many other industries, the economic evisceration of entire communities and the unfettered offshoring of millions of our best jobs to foreign countries and foreign polluters. Millions and millions of jobs would go, thousands and thousands of countries would be at a level that you’ve never seen. Companies would be disappearing, left, and right, just like they did with NAFTA, which we terminated for the USMCA, which is another beauty that we’ve done, not for now, but another great beauty. (Trump, 16 July 2020)*

Trump attempted to raise fears of losing at several levels so he could use fear of loss for the needs of different social classes. Hence, he raised the fear of economic loss for factory owners: *No coal, no gas, no oil, nothing to fire our massive plants* at the same time raising the fear of job losses for workers – *millions and millions of jobs would go*. Thus, fear of loss became an individual need in more than one social class and through this Trump mobilized ‘the people’ to vote for him to avoid these losses.

In the following quote, Trump used the framing of economic loss due to immigrants, which is in the horizontal populist othering or ‘the problem’ in the collective frame. Trump also framed immigration challenges by overestimation the number of immigrants who will consequently affect individuals’ economic levels. For example, these immigrants will take the jobs from the American people and their families.

*To protect our country and our agents during the pandemic, my administration took immediate action to ensure the safe and rapid return of all illegal aliens. We brought them back. We have very few in our country now. We brought them back, can you believe it? To protect U.S. workers, I suspended the entry of low-wage workers that threatened all of your jobs, American jobs, and we’re finalizing the new H-1B regulations to permanently end the displacement of US workers. (Trump, 18 August 2021)*

By showing the effect of financial loss threats on American workers, the people will try to avoid this loss by voting for Trump.

I also identified another important feature of Trump’s speeches, as he not only framed the losses but presented them in a disastrous way to have a greater impact on people’s feelings. In the following section I discuss this with some examples.

### d) Framing of apocalyptic loss: The doom

Apocalyptic framing can be observed in relation to the protests following George Floyd's death where Trump framed national issues not just as a security threat but he framed the situation to hit the very core of true Christian American believers. In other words, he framed national instability as something against humanity and God:

*A police precinct has been overrun here in the nation's Capital, the Lincoln Memorial and the World War II Memorial have been vandalized. One of our most historic churches was set ablaze. A federal officer in California, an African American enforcement hero, was shot and killed. These are not acts of peaceful protest, these are acts of domestic terror. The destruction of innocent life and the spilling of innocent blood is an offense to humanity and a crime against God. (Trump, 21 June 2020)*

This form of apocalyptic framing is evident in almost all the references and construction of crises. For instance, there was an apocalyptic framing of the potential loss of Western civilization's history and values as something that will have apocalyptic consequences for the very essence of Americans. This is clear in the following quote, where Trump framed national instability caused by the 'mobs' as having apocalyptic consequences which will *wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values.*

*1776 represented the culmination of thousands of years of Western civilization and the triumph of not only spirit, but of wisdom, philosophy, and reason. And yet, as we meet here tonight, there is a growing danger that threatens every blessing our ancestors fought so hard for, struggled, they bled to secure. Our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children. Angry mobs are trying to tear down statues of our founders, deface our most sacred memorials, and unleash a wave of violent crime in our cities. (Trump, 3 July 2020)*

By presenting apocalyptic consequences, Trump offered potential voters two options: either he won and saved them (Müller, 2016) or the catastrophic loss that the 'others' would bring, which is illustrated in the above quote where he suggested that the 'others' would bring destruction, contempt, anarchy, hatred, and chaos. 'True Americans' who voted for him stood for creation, cooperation, security, healing, and justice. The 'others' in this case were the protesters who were portrayed as having a different ideology that threatened individuals' financial levels and 'the people's' values and rights. The catastrophic consequences caused by the 'others' constituted a sharp division in society between 'us' and 'them'. By doing so, Trump created a space to incite and ignite the need for him to be in power to save catastrophic events from happening.

## **5.2 The blurring of frames and linking problems to enemies, to others, and loss**

This section discusses another important finding where I identify Trump's tendency to blur the lines between frames in his speeches. In other words, by focusing on the populist othering rhetoric, I was able to observe that Trump did not treat the frames as distinct and instead there was an overlap between the frames and dimensions.

While the diagnostic and motivational frames are not conceptually distinct, I found that Trump actively blurred the lines between the diagnostic frame or 'the problem' and the motivational

frame by identifying ‘the enemy’. I also found that blurring the lines between ‘the problem’ and ‘the enemy’ enabled Trump to emphasize the threat of loss. This was found by analysing his speeches and paying special attention to the populism rhetoric of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and the framing of loss.

In relation to ‘othering’, Trump also collapsed and blurred the lines between ‘the corrupt elites’ and ‘immigrants’, where they became one subject. Another blurring of lines was observed in relation to frames of losses, related to a particular problem or event. Literature on national populist rhetoric stresses that an imagined and glorified past is important for mobilizing people to frame a ‘return’ to the golden age and bygone times (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019; Smith, 2009). The construction of ‘America in crisis’ was one of Trump’s hallmarks (Homolar & Scholz, 2019; Inwood, 2019; Rowland, 2019) and became a key feature of the thematic analysis of the scripts and speeches of his second presidential campaign in this study. However, I argue that the ‘golden age’ served an additional purpose with specific reference to the construction of America in crisis. By adopting the prospect theory and the framing of loss more specifically, Trump actively constructed what I refer to as an imagined uncertain future where losing and crisis play key roles. I found that Trump’s speeches often included multidimensional and very intense messages in a paragraph or sentence to construct what I refer to as an ‘imagined uncertain future’. This construction provided Trump the leverage to steer people’s actions since it took into account the fact that people behave differently under uncertain situations by avoiding risks (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992).

This overlapping and the number of threats that were amplified seemed to signal and frame an overwhelming situation that was filled with different threats and losses and the need to avoid any disaster or apocalyptic risks. This blurring of lines between the frames and othering as well as losses was a key factor in mobilizing people to vote for Trump.

The following quote is a salient example of blurring the lines between frames in Trump’s speech following the death of George Floyd.

*The left-wing mob is trying to demolish our heritage so they can replace it with a new repressive regime that they alone control. They’re tearing down statues, desecrating monuments, and purging dissenters. It’s not the behaviour of a peaceful political movement. It’s the behaviour of totalitarians and tyrants and people that don’t love our country. They don’t love our country. The left is not trying to promote justice, or equality, or lift up the downtrodden. They have one goal, the pursuit of their own political power, for whatever reason, but that’s their goal. That really seems to be their goal. Their goal, or their sickness. And if you give power to people that demolish monuments and attack churches and seize city streets, and set fire to buildings, then nothing is sacred, and no one is safe. (Trump, 23 June 2020)*

This quote shows how Trump blurred the line between diagnostic and motivational frames and collapsed and blurred the lines between the ‘othering’ in both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Trump referred to the protesters as *left-wing*, *mobs*, *criminals*, and *terrorists*, which is the diagnostic or ‘the problem’, as they are “*trying to demolish our heritage*. In line with this, they are ‘them’ in the horizontal ‘othering’, where they have been framed as a minority group with a different ideology; the *left-wing* and *mobs* could be framed as any other minority groups. However, I observed elsewhere in Trump’s speeches that he linked the left-wing to Biden and

‘the corrupt elites’ in many ways, such as: *Joe Biden is the puppet of the radical left-wing movement that seeks the complete elimination of America’s borders and boundaries* (Trump, 18 August 2020).

Therefore, the left-wing was framed in the ‘othering’ in the vertical dimension, which was competing for power: *they have one goal, the pursuit of their own political power* (Trump, 23 June 2020). By doing so, the left-wing was made the motivational frame, and they ‘the enemy’ to motivate ‘the people’ to vote for Trump. Trump framed these categorizations of the ‘others’ not only as a problem but also motivationally to justify action against the protesters by stating:

*If you give power to people that demolish monuments and attack churches and seize city streets, and set fire to buildings, then nothing is sacred, and no one is safe.* (Trump, 23 June 2020)

This justification highlights the need to safeguard American values and history, such as the Lincoln and World War II memorials, and indirectly refers to the ongoing dismantling of southern civil war memorials, otherwise no one will be safe. This leads to the next blurriness between the frames of loss.

As indicated in Trump’s speech earlier, the threat of losses was framed to stem from both ‘immigrants’ and ‘corrupt elites’, making the negative effects of fear of loss have a stronger effect on ‘the people’. The quote refers to different frames of losses in values and social security loss, all of which are caused by the protesters. Trump framed them as the ‘other’ groups such as *the left-wing* or the *mob*. This is the reason these threats of losses overlapped between ‘other’ groups and ‘the corrupt elites’. The left-wing was framed as a political opponent and posing a threat of loss to the country’s political and social identity such as *trying to demolish our heritage so they can replace it with a new repressive regime that they alone control*. In addition, the left-wing could be in the ‘other’ group, which is in the horizontal dimension, where it was framed as a threat to values and identity loss, as indicated in the following sentence from the same speech: *And if you give power to people that demolish monuments and attack churches and seize city streets, and set fire to buildings, then nothing is sacred, and no one is safe.*

Thus, I argue that this indicates how Trump applied the same terms *the left-wing* or *mobs* to express the fear of loss, by blurring the line between the ‘corrupt elites’ and ‘outsider’ groups. On one hand the left-wing could be the ‘corrupt elites and they could be the protesters’ the ‘outsider’ on the other hand which their acts could cause different types of losses. For example, by referring to the ‘mob’s’ as ‘outsider’ and their actions such as the ‘attack [on] churches and seize city streets, and set fire to buildings, then nothing is sacred, and no one is safe.’ ‘Attacking churches’ represents a threat of loss to the core of American people’s beliefs and is an attack on Christianity as a religion. Their actions are not only framed as criminal but also as the reason for financial losses, social security, and values.

Another example can be found in the following quote, where Biden is ‘waging war against the American middle class’. He is framed as the enemy, since Biden was involved in signing trade agreements that were not in the interests of *real Americans*. Though we have observed that Trump justified the ‘enemy’ in the motivational frame as well as ‘the corrupt elites’ in vertical othering, yet Trump stressed that Biden was subject to the radical left, where the ‘left-wing’ was framed elsewhere as ‘mobs’ and ‘criminals’ which is ‘the problem’ in the collective action

frames and as the ‘other’ group in the horizontal. I argue that Trump blurred the line between diagnostic and motivational frames as well as othering in both the dimensions. Therefore, blurring the line between the frames and dimensions makes the loss catastrophic and has a stronger impact on individuals:

*The left wants to get rid of me so they can come after you. It’s very simple. Over the last three and a half years, we’ve secured America’s borders, blocked the entry of foreign terrorists, fixed our disastrous trade deals and we have fixed our trade deals good. They are good.* (Trump, 10 September 2020)

In relation to frames of loss in this speech, Trump talked about the left-wing as a political opponent where the left-wing’s access to power means they will *get rid of me*, ‘the strong man’. Which suggests that getting rid of Trump would mean getting rid of the person who confronts ‘the corrupt elites’ and their policies.

Other examples can be found in relation to blurring the lines between the framing of financial threats and social safety losses. Previous studies (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019; Inwood, 2019; Mutz, 2018) discuss how these losses are usually framed as a threat posed to ‘typical’ white middle-class men. This was also evident in Trump’s second presidential campaign when he framed refugees coming from the most dangerous regions in the world as threatening America’s economic level and social safety. Such framing turned what was regarded as a humanitarian issue of helping the refugees to a matter of national safety and the hard-working white people’s rights, which had been taken by non-whites who took advantage of the immigration policies. This abuse of the system had a negative impact on individuals:

*We know the good and we know the bad. We’ve suspended refugee resettlements from the world’s most dangerous regions because nothing is more important than keeping America safe. To me, that’s number one.* (Trump, 18 August 2020)

*We also put into place vital measures to protect American workers, keep out terrorists, and stop the abuse of our welfare system.* (Trump, 12 January 2021)

In these speeches Trump is referring to his refugee policies and measures as a good policy and by doing so he is framing his political opponents as corrupt elites working against ‘the people’s’ interests; therefore, his political opponents form the motivational frame in the vertical othering. In the diagnostic frame the problem is the refugees, the ‘terrorists’, which is the framing of the ‘welfare state’s’ loss and the frame of social safety loss. In relation to blurring the lines of frames of loss, the migrants as ‘the problem’ are leading to a threat of losses at the economic and social level.

### **5.3 Framing of global challenges and threat to individuals**

A core characteristic in the rhetoric of populism is the evocation of apocalyptic scenarios (Brandt, 2020; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019), where events and issues are dramatized and linked to consequences for individuals. This dramatization of events requires and demands ‘apocalyp-

tic confrontations' (Lee, 2006). What is more, the need for apocalyptic loss seems to be constructed around the lines of 'the people' and the 'enemy' (Lee, 2006). Thus, observing the framing of apocalyptic loss in Trump's polarized rhetoric was not a surprise. However, what is interesting is how he framed the apocalyptic loss. According to Osmundsen and Petersen (2020) people may decide to take action with much higher risks if the situation requires personal (self-regarding) decisions compared to issues related to political (others-regarding) decisions. Trump seemed to effectively reconstruct political issues such as trade agreements by specifying how these broad and global issues will have a direct negative impact on Americans and their families. For example, his assertion that NAFTA will have apocalyptic consequences for individuals, in terms of factories and jobs, *Joe Biden surrendered your jobs to China*.

*Outsourcing Michigan's factories, throwing open your borders, dragging us into endless foreign wars and surrendering our children's future to China and other faraway lands. Biden supported every disastrous globalist sell-out for over a half a century, including NAFTA, China, and DPP. You know that. Joe Biden surrendered your jobs to China and now he wants to surrender our country to the violent left-wing mob and you're seeing that every night.* (Trump, 10 September 2020)

Trump framed Biden as the 'corrupt elites' working against 'the people's' interest on the international level and what its impact would be on the personal level, where global policies and agreements were threatening an individual's social safety and future, *surrendering our children's future to China and other faraway lands*.

In the following speech it is evident how Trump blurred the lines again by pointing to Biden as the 'corrupt elite', in the vertical dimension of 'othering', and on the other hand he is owned by 'the radical globalists', which makes the line between the vertical and horizontal dimensions blurred. Also, I argue that this speech captures how a global issue such as the global economy is framed with clear individual and personal consequences that steer people's emotions:

*Joe Biden is also owned by the radical globalists, the wealthy donors, the big money special interests who shipped away your jobs, shut down your factories, threw open your borders and ravaged our cities while sacrificing American blood and treasure in these ridiculous, endless wars. The Set of endless wars that we've been in for a long time. Nineteen years, they're all coming back home. You know that, right?* (Trump, 12 October 2020)

This framing and clarification of how broad political issues have a direct self-regarding consequence for an individual provides the possibility of mobilizing voters to act.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

This study showed that Trump's escalation of the national-populist rhetoric was directed against the 'others' and clearly identified the 'others' as migrants and elites, or as Brubaker argues, in both dimensions of othering. The incitement rhetoric against 'others' is one of the reasons that paved the way for identifying problems and enemies that contributed towards mobilizing voters to vote for Trump and not the 'enemy'. Trumpism is characterized by populist rhetoric which

creates divisions that offer fertile ground for understanding the central role of loss in populist othering and the framing of problems and enemies.

This thesis focused on the collective action frames used by Trump during his second presidential election campaign, with specific attention paid to the diagnostic and motivational frames, the role of othering, and the frame of loss. It highlighted three main approaches that Trump used for mobilizing voters. First, in collective action Trump blurred the lines between diagnostic and motivational frames by filling it with the content of othering and loss for the people, which, in turn, mobilized voters. In other words, the immigration policies of the ‘corrupt elites’ were against ‘the people’s’ interests, which made them ‘the enemy’. At the same time, they were part of ‘the problem’ as they were framed elsewhere as being controlled by the ‘others’ such as ‘the left-wing’.

In relation to populist othering, Trump blurred the line between the vertical and horizontal dimensions, that is, he blurred the lines between the left-wing, which represents the ‘others’ in the horizontal othering, and they became a part of the ruling elites in the vertical dimension in Trump’s speeches. Therefore, I argue that it is not only about problems and solutions, but it is also about different type of othering and losses.

In relation to blurring the lines between frames of loss, Trump blurred the frames of losses such as values, economic losses and social safety as a result of the immigration ‘problem’. Second, while Brubaker (2017) illustrated ‘the othering’ in the vertical (the people versus the elites) and horizontal dimensions (the people versus the ‘migrants’), the intersection of othering in Trump’s speeches is a central finding as it shows the ‘common enemy’ but an ‘enemy’ at different levels, such as Kamala Harris as an elite but also an immigrant and a woman. The intersection of different layers of othering therefore has a stronger negative effect against the ‘enemy’ since it frames the enemy by signalling different ‘others’ at the same time.

Third, the apocalyptic framing of loss, which was often used by Trump as a motivational frame to mobilize voters, has been documented as one of the characteristics of populist framing. Osmundsen and Petersen (2020) made a distinction between situations that require personal (self-regarding) decisions and those that require political (others-regarding) decisions and found that people with high needs take more risks when the issue is in relation to personal self-regard. These authors focused on the receivers of the communication and how they were willing to take risks depending on the situation. My study offers an alternative perspective with specific attention to personal communication. My study’s focus was on Trump as the main communicator. Trump was able to frame global political challenges that mainly had to do with ‘others-regarding’ decisions as he broke down the messages/issues till they had clear personal and self-regard consequences.

Taken together, I argue that combining the three theoretical concepts made it possible to observe three distinct approaches of framing used simultaneously in a rhetoric that constructed crises, which enabled Trump to mobilize people to vote for him and incite the attack on the United States Capitol. This study also identified that Trump’s populist rhetoric involved heightened incitement against his political opponents and minority groups by crossing the line of political correctness. This may pave the way for a return to behaviours and ideologies such as violence and racism that modern democratic societies are trying to overcome. Trumpism also

divided society sharply and raised different types of fears of catastrophic losses like values, economic losses, and social security, and turned them into an individual threat to both the workers and the middle class. Hence, othering and loss and blurring the lines between all the frames and othering played a key role in mobilizing the people to vote for Trump.

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