



TEAM POPULISM

TEAM POPULISM – LEADER PROFILE SERIES

Andrew Jackson: A Populist President?

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WHAT IS TEAM POPULISM?

Team Populism brings together renowned scholars from Europe and the Americas to study the causes and consequences of populism. We seek to answer why some populist parties, leaders or movements are more successful than others.

Our general argument is that populism is best understood as a combination of individual and contextual issues ("demand side") and the availability of successful leaders ("supply side").

We expand on this broad framework by studying multiple levels of analysis, and we draw on different methodological tools, including experiments, surveys, and comparative analysis. To facilitate this work, individual teams are organized around functional tasks.

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“‘Like Jackson's populism, we're going to build an entirely new political movement,’ White House chief strategist Stephen Bannon said in an interview shortly after Trump's victory” (Schonfield, 2017). Andrew Jackson is regularly considered one of America’s most populist presidents—yet no scholar has definitively and objectively measured the extent of Jackson’s populism using a combined quantitative and qualitative approach. To what extent can Andrew Jackson truly be considered populist, based on the holistic speech-coding method of evaluating populism? This report will outline the historical context and previous efforts to measure Jackson’s populism. It will then describe the methodology and the results of the speech coding. Finally, it will offer a qualitative analysis of the quantitative results, with the corresponding conclusions and further implications that can be based on this research. Ultimately, the data show that despite the ways in which Jackson has been portrayed both in his time and in contemporary times, a representative sample of speeches from his two terms as president between 1829-1837 indicate at best a moderate level of populism in the discourse of Jackson himself, mostly in his second term. Perceptions of him as populist more likely stem from how he was advertised by proponents and opponents alike.

Context and Literature Review

Andrew Jackson was born in the Carolinas in 1767, practiced law, and eventually represented Tennessee as a Congressman and Senator. He served in the military during the War of 1812 and became distinguished as a military hero in his victory at the Battle of New Orleans (Freidel & Sidey, 2006). In his first attempt to become president in the election of 1824, his rival candidates included three former cabinet members and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Despite the impressive qualifications of his competitors, Jackson received a

plurality of the popular vote at 43%, with 99 electoral votes—more than any of his competitors, but not the clear majority necessary to win the election (Feller, 2017). In what Jackson deemed a “corrupt bargain,” Speaker of the House Henry Clay used his influence to draw support for former Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. When Adams became president, he in turn named Henry Clay his Secretary of State. Campaign literature for Andrew Jackson identified this suspicious exchange as evidence of the conspiring evil elite—established politicians.

In 1828, Jackson did achieve a clear electoral majority, and he secured reelection in 1832 (Feller, 2017). Several policy issues have come to define his presidency, including the Indian Removal Act, his veto of the renewal charter of the National Bank, and his response to the South Carolina nullification crisis (Feller, 2017). The veto of the National Bank is perhaps the most overtly populist struggle Jackson participated in during his presidency. The National Bank had been created by Alexander Hamilton as a necessary institution for the financial stability of the nation; Jackson, however, viewed the bank as a symbol of elite oppression that must be destroyed on behalf of the common people, and when its charter was up for renewal, he opposed it with great vehemence as “the people’s tribune” (Formisano 2008). The bank, nullification, and Indian Removal Act are the policies that Jackson himself highlights as some of the most essential of his presidency in his Farewell speech in March of 1837.

Historians, political scientists, and economists have used diverse definitions and methods to describe Jackson’s populism. Such methods include using qualitative evidence to analyze the effect of Jackson’s populism on the formation and dissolution of the Democratic and Whig parties (Brookhiser 2016) and analyzing Jackson in the context of populist rhetoric in U.S. presidential elections (Formisano 2010). Still other scholars attempt to qualitatively define the policies and rhetoric that defined Jacksonian Democracy (Belko 2010) or measure specifically

for class populism and pejorative references to elites (Rhodes and Johnson 2017). Terri Bimes and Quinn Mulroy (2004) use a combined qualitative and quantitative approach to identify the number of “populist appeals” in speeches by each nineteenth-century president; Jackson had the most populist appeals out of the 37 presidents analyzed by that method. Ultimately, however, each of these methodologies lacks critical elements of the ideational approach, omitting the requirements for a Manichaeian dualistic discourse or identification of an elite enemy of the people. Such omissions limit objective cross-comparisons with other leaders.

Methodology

This project uses the holistic grading method of measuring populism, wherein coders read each speech in its entirety and, using a rubric, evaluate it for essentially three important elements of populism: a Manichaeian discourse, a populist notion of the people, and references to an evil elite. Each speech is ranked on a scale of 0-2, with 0 indicating a discourse that is completely non-populist, and 2 indicating a speech with strong themes of all the essential elements of populism. Ideally, each speech is double coded to ensure accuracy, and results typically show a high level of inter-coder reliability (Hawkins 2009; Hawkins and Kocijan 2013).

When measuring populist leaders, comparability is maintained by coding a speech from four distinct categories: a campaign speech, a famous speech, an international speech, and a ribbon-cutting speech. Each of these categories has slightly different characteristics. For example, populism is often higher in campaign or famous speeches, and lower in small, spontaneous speeches to domestic audiences. For the specific requirements for each category, see the appendix.

Though the original intent of this project was to use speeches from those four main categories, I encountered challenges in the lack of availability of speeches in some of the categories. For example, in the culture of Jackson's era in the 1820s and 1830s, it was not customary for presidential candidates to travel and campaign for themselves; according to University of Tennessee historian Daniel Feller (2017), "candidates did not actively seek votes or make promises." There were informal nominating conventions at which other officials or citizens could make speeches in support of or against various candidates, but the campaign structure was not as formal as it is today. Accordingly, there are no campaign speeches made by Jackson himself in the historical record. Additionally, due to slow methods of travel and the relative geographical isolation of the United States, no president traveled abroad while in office until Theodore Roosevelt in 1906. There are thus no speeches given by Andrew Jackson to international audiences. Though he addresses Congress on international subjects on occasion, and we have tried to draw a sample from such speeches, these are not truly comparable with the usual definition of an international speech.

Given the limited access to the usual categories of speeches, I revised my research methodology. The selection of speeches now includes four representative examples from each presidential term or eight total. Since famous speeches typically have higher levels of populism, I assume that if populism cannot be found or exists only at low levels in these speeches, it is unlikely that it would have been evident the discourse of any other category. In the selection of speeches, however, I have worked to obtain reasonable comparability between terms; the speeches from each term include speeches to large audiences (the First Inaugural Address, the Farewell Speech) and speeches just to Congress; speeches on controversial issues (like Indian

Removal and Nullification) and fairly routine speeches (accepting an honor as head of state, reporting to Congress).

Additionally, I have analyzed one 1824 campaign speech and one 1828 campaign speech given on behalf of Jackson, in order to ascertain whether Jackson was only portrayed to be populist by his supporters, contributing to a misperception that he displayed high levels of populism in his own discourse. Even such campaign speeches were limited in availability; however, we analyzed the most pertinent samples available in order to gain some insights into this possibility. All speeches were taken from archives of presidential speeches made available by the American Presidency Project, the Miller Center of the University of Virginia, and the Library of Congress.

I coded all speeches, and to verify the reliability of my coding, selected a sample of two speeches from each term, or 50% of the sample, for a second experienced coder to code and verify. This method provides enough inter-coder reliability that I am satisfied with the results of the other speeches; all of the double-coded scores were within a half-point of the scale from each other.

Results

The coded results of Jackson’s speeches for the two terms are summarized in the table below, ordered chronologically by the date each speech was given:

Table 1.1 Jackson’s Populist Discourse, 1829-1837

<i>Title</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Coder 1 Score</i>	<i>Coder 2 Score</i>	<i>Average/Final Score</i>
First Inaugural Address	Term 1.1	March 4, 1829	0.4	0.2	0.3
Acceptance of A Gold Medal from Colombia, Special Message to Congress	Term 1.2	January 19, 1830	0.0	~	0.0

Message Regarding Indian Relations	Term 1.3	February 22, 1831	0.1	~	0.1
Bank Veto	Term 1.4	July 10, 1832	0.8	0.9	0.85
Message Regarding South Carolina Nullification of Federal Legislation	Term 2.1	January 16, 1833	0.4	0.8	0.6
Message on the Constitutional Rights and Responsibilities of the President	Term 2.2	December 12, 1833	0.0	~	0.0
Sixth Annual Message to Congress	Term 2.3	December 1, 1834	0.4	~	0.4
Farewell Address	Term 2.4	March 4, 1837	1.6	1.6	1.6

Over the course of two terms, the populism in Andrew Jackson’s speeches ranges from 0 to 1.6. On average, however, his speeches ranked fairly low; the unweighted average score for the four selected speeches of his first term is 0.31, and the average for the speeches in his second term is 0.65. Given the slight but notable increase, it does seem as though Jackson’s discursive populism increased from his first term to his second; I will examine possible explanations for this phenomenon shortly. However, the overall level of populism is still quite low. Though Jackson does use some populist tactics in his speeches, there are many opportunities for him to state his points much more strongly that he simply does not take advantage of. An important point of comparison here is within the sample: the speeches given on Jackson’s behalf at conventions supporting him had much stronger language and elements of populism; they clearly articulated a sense of a good, ordinary “people” at odds with a knowing, duplicitous, conspiring “elite,” all in the framework of a strong good vs. evil, Manichaeian conflict. It does seem possible, then, that the perception of Jackson as populist results more from how he was advertised than how he himself spoke.

Additionally, because of the comparability of this method, I can provide an international perspective. Well-known populist leaders in the 20th century include figures such as Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia—whose respective populism scores, on average, are 1.9 and 1.6, or extremely populist (Hawkins 2009). In their discourse, these leaders take the popular mandate as permission to violate democratic rights for the evil elite, to accomplish whatever good is necessary for the benefit of the people. Jackson’s discourse, though it acknowledges the will of the people and strikes an anti-establishment tone at times, is not nearly so extreme—thus the far lower scores for each term and overall. Placing Jackson in an international context more clearly demonstrates the relatively low level of populism in all but one or two of his speeches—further weakening any assertion that he was the singular example of populism in the American presidency.

The results of campaign convention speeches given both for and against Jackson are summarized in the table below. Because a second experienced coder already verified the reliability of the speeches for each term and confirmed the accuracy of the coding, the speeches below have been coded only once, but I am comfortable that the scores are accurate.

Table 1.2 Populist Discourse in the 1824 and 1828 Presidential Campaigns

<i>Title</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Score</i>
Address Delivered Before the Jackson Convention of Delegates	Campaign Literature	1824	1.7
New Jersey State Convention	Campaign Literature	January 8, 1828	2.0

As noted in the methodology description above, the scarcity of speeches in the historical record made it difficult to find examples from speeches in the four categories typically measured. Nevertheless, because we strove to collect speeches from a variety of occasions in Jackson’s presidency and the scores of the two terms are relatively close, Jackson’s overall populism is reasonably comparable with other populist leaders. In the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, the

discourse of Donald Trump averaged 0.7, compared to Andrew Jackson's aggregate term average of 0.5 (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018).

Qualitative Analysis: What constituted Jackson's populism?

The quantitative populism scores are based on three qualitative categories: a notion of the will of the righteous people, a conspiring evil elite, and a Manichaeian framework. This qualitative analysis will draw from the eight coded Jackson speeches and from the three 1824 and 1828 campaign speeches in the sample to highlight specific quotes that demonstrate elements that are particularly populist or pluralist. Most of the quotes can be found in the completed rubrics in the appendix of this paper. Though the elements of populist discourse are certainly present in some of Jackson's speeches, these are balanced with many examples of pluralist discourse; this analysis will attempt to contextualize the quotes to support the conclusion that contrary to claims that Jackson was a strong populist, much of his own discourse had a milder, more pluralist tone.

The People

Modern observers have sought to identify Jackson as the quintessential example of an anti-establishment, people's president. There is certainly some historical support for the claim—at Jackson's inauguration, “thousands watched with pleasure as when he bowed to the crowd in a sign of respect for popular sovereignty” and a “horde of office seekers turned his inaugural reception into a near-riot” (Howe, 2007, p. 328-331). In the campaign leading up to his ultimate election in 1828, Jackson was disdained by his enemies but lauded by his advocates as the candidate of the common man. “He is sustained by the people,” declared one such supporter at the Democratic New Jersey state convention. The speeches with the highest populism ratings

from each term—his Bank Veto message from the first term and Farewell Address from the second—give hints as to how Jackson himself understood the people. In the Bank Veto address, which had a populism score of 0.85, he defines them by occupation and class; the “people” are “the humble members of society—the farmers, mechanics, and laborers.” Jackson argues that the charter of the National Bank subverts their interest and will, by adding “artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful;” consequently, the people have a right to complain of injustice. In the narrative of the speech, by getting rid of the National Bank, Jackson is serving in the broader role of advocating for the interests of the common people, whose will is broad and unchanging; as Jackson emphasizes to the listening crowds in his Farewell speech (populism score of 1.6), “It is always in your power to see that the wishes of the people are carried into faithful execution, and their will, when once made known, must sooner or later be obeyed.” As their representative, Jackson has been chosen and thus has the serious responsibility of standing for what is best for the working-class, the real American people.

Where populism upholds the people as the highest good with no possible flaw, pluralist discourse recognizes that democracy is simply the balance of the votes. In some of his discourse, Jackson leans more pluralist in that respect. He remarks that “citizens of the United States are restrained” by the laws that protect the Native Americans, and rightfully so (Message on Indian Relations, score of 0.1). Instead of representing a constraint on the people as odious, he simply states those circumstances as fact. In other speeches, he similarly refers to the people neutrally. For example, in speaking of an international diplomacy situation he was attempting to resolve, Jackson did not romanticize the people nor argue that they were united by some knowable will; he merely articulated the reasons why the citizens (the people, but in a broad, legalistic sense)

had just causes for complaint, and how he would attempt to negotiate to resolve their concerns (Sixth Annual Message to Congress, score of 0.4). Though some notion of the people was a consistent theme in Jackson's speeches, it was fairly mild—and in other speeches, Jackson did not romanticize the people at all.

The Evil Elite

In order for a leader to be considered populist, a leader must identify a specific minority group who can be blamed for actively conspiring to subvert the will of the people in order to secure their own selfish interests. In Jackson's discourse, this element is less clearly articulated than his notion of the good people. However, Jackson does clearly warn against some powerful duplicitous factions. The previously mentioned 1824 election was quickly characterized by Jackson and his supporters as “the corrupt bargain” and a clear example of the Washington establishment subverting the collective will of the people. Jackson had won a clear majority of the popular vote, and yet the established politicians had ignored the people's selection in order to perpetuate their own system and retain power. This theme comes through clearly in the campaign speech for Andrew Jackson's 1828 election; “Mr. Adams was elected... without the assent of a majority of the people, in violations of the spirit of the constitution,” the speaker fumes (1828 Campaign Literature, score of 2.0). Moreover, “the encroachments of power are always artful and insidious,” and the power of the elite must be curbed by bringing in a candidate from outside the establishment. Thus, Jackson's entire presidency was established on a premise of thwarting the corrupt evil elite, and Jackson had a mandate from the people to represent their interests and curb the power of those insidious forces. It is important to note, however, that the above quotes

are not from Jackson himself, but from a speech given in support of him; although he may have agreed, he did not speak these words.

The “elites” that Jackson targeted were not just the established politicians in Washington, but also the bankers and the wealthy in general who tried to manipulate the system to secure their own interests. One of the greatest controversies of his presidency was the “Bank War.” When Nicholas Biddle, President of the Second National Bank of the United States, applied for an early renewal of the bank’s charter in 1832, Jackson fought hard against it, viewing it as an institution of the rich, unchecked by government regulation or oversight from the people (Howe, 2007, 379). “It is easy to conceive that great evils to our country and its institutions might flow from such a concentration of power in the hands of a few men irresponsible to the people,” he notes in his veto message for the bill to renew the charter. He rebuked the elite whom he identified as the greatest beneficiaries of the bank system; “it is to be regretted,” he says, “that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes” (Bank Veto). Such language does indicate that in vetoing the National Bank, Jackson felt that he was striking a blow to the evil elite, on behalf of the people.

Jackson’s Farewell speech reiterates his perceptions of the National Bank operating in opposition to the will of the people, with evil elites at its head. Jackson spoke of “the moneyed power,” and “many powerful interests” at work to subvert the people’s will. “Many of our rich men have not been content with equal protection and equal benefits, but have besought us to make them richer by act of Congress,” he complains, disgusted by the attempted abuses of power he saw while in the presidency. Not only had the moneyed power sought to subvert the will of the people by petitioning Congress for unjustly favorable treatment, but they had already manipulated the system, to the detriment of the nation; “the country has already felt the injurious

effects of their combined influence,” he warned, pointing specifically to a tariff that bore “most oppressively on the agricultural and laboring classes of society.” In other words, the good, hardworking people were suffering as a result of the cronyism between the powerful rich interests and their equally insidious Congressional counterparts, who allowed the rich to prosper at the expense of the poor. Such rhetoric is very consistent with the way evil elites are described in populist discourse.

Jackson’s Farewell speech also warns the people of another insidious influence—the individuals on both sides of the slavery debate who sought to unnecessarily stir up contention and war. According to Jackson, his group of elites wanted war in order to cement their power in the various regions of the United States and were using the slavery question as a ruse to obtain power at the expense of the people. Of these individuals, Jackson said, “artful and designing men will always be found who are ready to foment these fatal divisions and to inflame the natural jealousies of different sections of the country.” He then elaborates further on the deliberate nature of their attack; he said, “We behold the systematic efforts publicly made to sow the seeds of discord between different parts of the United States...to excite the South against the North and the North against the South.” Jackson accuses them of blatant political manipulation, working to “influence the election of Chief Magistrate, as if it were desired that he should favor a particular quarter of the country instead of fulfilling the duties of his station with impartial justice to all.” For Jackson, the threat of elites on both sides of the slavery debate working to incite strong emotions in the people to gain political power was a serious, and unseen threat, one which he was responsible to warn the people of.

For Jackson, then, there was not just one group of evil elites. The elite could be the Washington D.C. political establishment, the bankers and the wealthy, or the factions that sought

war in the United States. Although these groups often comprised different people and different methods, the end of the elites was the same—to obtain money and power at the expense of the people. Not every speech articulates this threat, but those that do articulate it strongly. Jackson felt that there was a clear and terrible threat to the people through various groups of evil elites.

Yet, such populist elements of Jackson’s discourse are tempered by a pluralist respect for the rule of law. Though Jackson warned of some potential abuses of power by evil elite groups, he still felt that all action to address those problems needed to remain lawful. In his 1829 Inaugural Address (score of 0.3), he showed a mindfulness of the limits of his power: “In administering the laws of Congress I shall keep steadily in view the limitations as well as the extent of the Executive power, trusting thereby to discharge the functions of my office without transcending its authority.” Pure populist discourse more typically has the executive pushing to revoke some of the protections of the law in order to combat the insidious evil and advocate for the people. Jackson likewise indicates his respect for the different, proper roles of the branches of government in a later speech; “Knowing the constitutional rights of the Senate, I shall be the last man under any circumstances to interfere with them” (Rights and Responsibilities of the President, score of 0.0). Though the campaign speeches on his behalf emphasize his radically anti-establishment position and opposition to all established politicians in Washington, his actual discourse over the course of his presidency strikes at various occasions a much more tolerant tone. Jackson’s respectful acknowledgment of the limitations of his office and the rights of other political leaders (even if they are part of an elite group) is very pluralist.

The Manichaeian Framework

The identification of the will of the people and the evil elites attempting to sabotage it are important elements of populist discourse—but in order to truly be populist, they must occur in a framework of good and evil being diametrically opposed. This strongly moral perspective also often assigns cosmic importance or significance to every issue. Jackson’s most populist speeches clearly display this Manichaeian vision as he emphasizes the dramatic divide between the good and the evil forces. His language is bellicose and exaggerated in speaking of the bank; his veto speech paints a portrait of the consequences of allowing the bank to continue—it would destroy the U.S. government system. “By attempting to gratify their desires we have in the results of our legislation arrayed section against section, interest against interest, and man against man, in a fearful commotion which threatens to shake the foundations of our Union.” At every level, whether local, state, or national, Jackson is demonstrating that the Bank matter is one of profound significance with dire consequences if not managed correctly. Said he,

The distress and alarm which pervaded and agitated the whole country when the Bank of the United States waged war upon the people in order to compel them to submit to its demands cannot yet be forgotten. The ruthless and unsparing temper with which whole cities and communities were oppressed, individuals impoverished and ruined, and a scene of cheerful prosperity suddenly changed into one of gloom and despondency ought to be indelibly impressed on the memory of the people of the United States. (Farewell Speech)

Clearly, Jackson did not feel that the matter of the bank was a simple political issue. It was a war, and there could be no sympathizing with the proponents of the bank; the bank represented oppression and poverty for the American people and therefore eliminated any possibility of nuance on the issue. This kind of characterization is typical of the Manichaeian perspective that often pervades populist discourse.

Jackson emphasizes the cosmic significance of his moment by invoking the counsel of the Founding Fathers and the blessings of God upon his efforts and the American people. In his Farewell Address, he quotes Washington's farewell address in showing that the elites who desire to stir up trouble between different areas of the country must be overcome. He sets up the U.S. system as a shining example to all other nations:

Our Constitution is no longer a doubtful experiment, and at the end of nearly half a century we find that it has preserved unimpaired the liberties of the people, secured the rights of property, and that our country has improved and is flourishing beyond any former example in the history of nations.

The U.S. is triumphant in overcoming difficulty and even exceeding the prosperity of other longer-established nations. Moreover, it is not alone. In his Bank Veto speech, he comforts his listeners by saying "In the difficulties which surround us and the dangers which threaten our institutions there is cause for neither dismay nor alarm. For relief and deliverance let us firmly rely on that kind Providence which I am sure watches with peculiar care over the destinies of our Republic, and on the intelligence and wisdom of our countrymen." Though the potential danger was real, the U.S. was guided and protected by a higher power and would be preserved from the insidious dangers working to destabilize it from within.

Though Jackson did clearly invoke a reified notion of history and structure issues in a moral, Manichean framework in some of his speeches, in other discourse, he was more pluralist. For example, in his Sixth Annual Message to Congress, he focuses on some narrow policy issues. "I propose at an early day to submit, in the proper form the appointment of a diplomatic agent to Venezuela," he tells Congress, then outlining some of the reasons why he was suggesting the change. He remained similarly neutral in describing reports that he received from Colombia—attaching no moral significance, merely stating the facts: "the envoy... had

succeeded in obtaining the assent of the council of ministers” (Acceptance of a Gold Medal from Colombia).

Conclusions and Implications

As shown in the above examples and qualitative analysis, Andrew Jackson clearly used a populist discourse when framing some discrete issues of his time. His bitterness towards wealthy elites or established politicians is evident in some of his words. However, those quotations come from just a couple of his most populist speeches. His level of populism is on the whole relatively low—just a 0 or low 1 on the scale, moderated by a great deal of the more common non-populist discourse. Why, then, is Jackson perceived to be such a populist president, and characterized that way in contemporary conversation? Undoubtedly, his style of presidency has influenced the modern perception of him. The rowdy crowds who stormed the White House at his Inaugural Reception, his campaigners’ emphasis on his popular mandate from the people, and his dislike of the establishment and departure from presidential norms all proved to observers in his time and since that he was a populist president. Yet, though Jackson is often cited as a strong example of an early American populist leader, his discourse simply does not support that assertion for any but a few speeches. Those attempting to link modern examples of populist leaders to Jackson can do so only tenuously.

It is true that the speeches here represent only a small sample of Jackson’s presidential speeches, and this report does not offer a comprehensive analysis of the historical context. However, given that these addresses include some of his most famous (and therefore most likely to have a populist tone) speeches, it is unlikely that further analysis would significantly alter Jackson’s overall populism score. Further grading efforts on Jackson’s speeches might yield

additional qualitative insights into the important issues of Jackson's day and how he and observers of his time perceived his relationship to the people.

This research provides insights for the study of populism in the United States, particularly early populism. This method of measuring populism provides comparability to other leaders; particularly where, as might be the case, the historical record is lacking and similar sampling procedures would prove necessary. More research into the early examples of populism or pluralism in the U.S. will also yield new data about American society and perceptions toward populism that can be used to explain modern trends in the political atmosphere as studied by political scientists.

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