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Pledge of Honesty

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Irene Ollinger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Abstract

Populism and securitization are two concepts that have become quite popular. However, there has not been much research done to explain why many leaders that are considered to be populists are also often accused of securitizing issues. This thesis seeks to answer how populists might use securitization in furtherance of their own populist objectives. In this thesis, Ernesto Laclau's definition of populism and the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory were used to construct a conceptual framework of the relationship between the two concepts. This framework hypothesized that populists can use securitization to aid in the formation of their movement by helping to form "the people" and an antagonistic relationship between "the people" and those with power. It also postulated that they could use securitization to attack the liberal institutions that they view constrain them, and that they could use "security" as an empty signifier for solidifying their movement. The thesis then applied this framework to Donald Trump's movement in the United States as he has been labeled a populist and accused of securitizing immigration. This was done via a discourse analysis of a selection of his speeches on immigration. The results of this analysis were that Trump's use of securitization was in alignment with that of the conceptual framework. Overall, the thesis concludes that securitization can serve as an effective mechanism for the formation and sustainment of populist movements.

Key Words: Populism, Securitization

Zusammenfassung

Populismus und Verbriefung sind zwei Konzepte, die sehr populär geworden sind. Es wurden jedoch nicht viele Forschungen durchgeführt, um zu erklären, warum vielen Anführern, die als Populisten gelten, häufig auch Verbriefungen vorgeworfen werden. Diese Arbeit versucht zu beantworten, wie Populisten Verbriefungen zur Förderung ihrer eigenen populistischen Ziele einsetzen könnten. In dieser Arbeit wurden Ernesto Laclaus Definition des Populismus und die Verbriefungstheorie der Kopenhagener Schule verwendet, um einen konzeptuellen Rahmen für die Beziehung zwischen den beiden Konzepten zu konstruieren. In diesem Rahmen wurde die Hypothese aufgestellt, dass Populisten Verbriefungen nutzen können, um die Bildung ihrer Bewegung zu unterstützen, indem sie dazu beitragen, „das Volk“ und eine antagonistische Beziehung zwischen „dem Volk“ und denjenigen mit Macht zu bilden. Es wurde auch postuliert, dass sie Verbriefungen nutzen könnten, um die liberalen Institutionen anzugreifen, von denen sie glauben, dass sie sie einschränken, und dass sie „Sicherheit“ als leeren Signifikanten zur Festigung ihrer Bewegung verwenden könnten. Die These wandte diesen Rahmen dann auf Donald Trumps Bewegung in den Vereinigten Staaten an, da er als Populist bezeichnet und der Verbriefung der Einwanderung beschuldigt wurde. Dies geschah über eine Diskursanalyse einer Auswahl seiner Reden zur Einwanderung. Das Ergebnis dieser Analyse war, dass Trumps Verwendung der Verbriefung mit der des konzeptionellen Rahmens übereinstimmte. Insgesamt kommt die These zu dem Schluss, dass Verbriefungen als wirksamer Mechanismus für die Bildung und Aufrechterhaltung populistischer Bewegungen dienen können.

Schlagwörter: Populismus, Verbriefung

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Chapter 1: Introduction/Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Whether it is in the media, scholarly works, or in general conversation, populism has become an increasingly popular topic. The media will often offer warnings and criticisms of populists, and then rattle off names of controversial leaders like Viktor Orban, Benjamin Netanyahu, Donald Trump, and Jair Bolsonaro. As populism has gained notoriety, another term, “securitization,” seems to have also grown in popularity, especially among scholars. It may not come as a surprise that many of the same leaders that have been labeled as populists are often also accused of securitizing certain issues. Given their increased popularity and usage, it is important that scholars attempt to fully understand all aspects of these concepts. While there have been a few studies done that examine how populism and securitization may relate to each other, there is not nearly enough research regarding this connection. Therefore, this thesis will examine the potential relationship between populism and securitization. Specifically, the rest of this thesis will be dedicated to answering the question: How can securitization be used to achieve populist objectives?

Answering this research question is important for a couple of reasons. The first of these is promoting the understanding of a political phenomenon. The recent success of populist movements has led to many scholars and experts trying to understand their strategy. Discerning how populists could utilize securitization to their own benefit may provide some useful insight into what facilitates the formation of a populist movement. As is mentioned above, both of these concepts have become increasingly popular in the last couple decades. Given that these two concepts seem to apply to many of the same world leaders, it is surprising that there have been so few studies into the relationship between the two. This thesis will further the comprehension of that relationship and hopefully provide a solid foundation for further research on the topic.

The thesis is broken into four chapters with the first being this introduction and a literature review. The second chapter will build a conceptual framework of the proposed relationship between populism and securitization by examining the discourse, the purposes, and the overlaps in these areas. In the third chapter, the thesis will apply this conceptual framework through a discourse analysis of a practical example of a populist that has been accused of using

securitization. Chapter four will provide the conclusion of the thesis, look at potential problems, and suggest areas for further research.

1.2 Literature Review

With the research question now having been introduced, a thorough evaluation of the relevant literature will be presented. This literature review will explore what current literature can offer to better understand the various components of this research question and, ideally, help answer it. It will be broken down into subsections on securitization, populism, and previous studies.

1.2.1 Securitization:

To begin with, nearly every other research project reviewed for this thesis included what is known as the Securitization Theory from the Copenhagen School. The term “securitization” was first used by Ole Waever in his 1993 book *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*. However, Securitization Theory is discussed in more detail in the book entitled *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde. This book helped in defining securitization and providing a framework that could be linked to that of populism for this thesis. Some other scholars including Philippe Bourbeau, who has written multiple books on securitization, have offered the criticism that the Securitization Theory presented by Buzan, Waever, and Wilde does not focus enough on the role that the audience plays in the process of securitization. Specifically, in his book *The Securitization of Migration: A Study of Movement and Order* Bourbeau says, “Specifying the role of audience is also crucial in working through these issues.”¹ He argues that Securitization Theory’s assertion that an actor initiates the securitization, and the audience chooses whether to accept it does not sufficiently take into account the audience’s ability to offer feedback and the multidirectionality of the relationship.² This thesis will help to address this discrepancy by exploring how the target audience being a developing populist movement may help to shape a securitization. In another piece entitled “Moving Forward Together: Logics of the securitisation process,” Bourbeau also discusses a different logic regarding the securitization process, which he refers to as the “logic of routine.” He raises some valid arguments about the way that securitization can also happen gradually over time and should not only focus on shocks. However, in the same piece, he also

¹ Philippe Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration: A Study of Movement and Order* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon [England]; New York: Routledge, 2011), 41.

² Bourbeau, 41.

refers to the Copenhagen School as the “current bench mark” in securitization research.³ His reference to Securitization Theory as the current benchmark was one of the reasons that this thesis relies so heavily on *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. As was mentioned above, the conceptual framework that will be constructed in the next chapter of this thesis is built with the securitization process laid out by Buzan, Waever, and Wilde in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*.

1.2.2 Populism:

While the literature on securitization at least provides what some consider to be a “benchmark” for research, the literature regarding populism lacks a consensus on what its definition should be. Cas Mudde captured this very well in his chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*:

Populism is undoubtedly an essentially contested concept, given that scholars even contest the essence and usefulness of the concept. While a disturbingly high number of scholars use the concept without ever defining it, others have defined populism as a type of political discourse, ideology, leadership, movement, phenomenon, strategy, style, syndrome, et cetera (e.g. Ionescu and Gellner, 1969). Even within one single discipline, like political science, scholars disagree fundamentally about the essence and usefulness of the concept of populism.⁴

It is this very absence of a consensus on populism that can make any research project which incorporates it very difficult to conduct. One popular approach to populism is the ideational approach that is well defined by Mudde in the same chapter mentioned above as, “An ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people.”⁵ In his own chapter entitled “Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Kurt Weyland criticizes Mudde’s ideational approach saying, “The ‘thin’ nature of populist ideology makes it difficult to ascertain and delimit this concept. This problem traditionally plagued ideology-centered and

³ Philippe Bourbeau, “Moving Forward Together: Logics of the Securitisation Process,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 1 (September 2014): 187, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829814541504>.

⁴ Cas Mudde, “Populism: An Ideational Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2019), 27.

⁵ Mudde, 29.

discursive notions and for years dissuaded political scientists from adopting them.”⁶ Weyland then discusses a system that was introduced to quantitatively assess discourse for populism. However, he argues that the ideational approach still suffers from an inability to delimit the concept as well as a misunderstanding of the “twisted meaning” of populism.⁷ Weyland’s strong arguments against the ideational approach played a major role in the rejection of that approach for this thesis. When looking at social or political groups, and more specifically those considered to be populists, it is difficult to argue that these groups are homogeneous. This lack of homogeneity leads into the next approach.

Another popular view on populism is that it is not an ideology but rather a political discursive logic. This approach has been argued for by various scholars, but the most influential are Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In their view, a populist movement is not constituted by an ideology, in part, because people have heterogeneous demands, and are not homogeneous as the ideational approach suggests. According to advocates of this approach, it is the unifying of these heterogeneous demands into one via empty signifiers and an antagonistic division of society into “the people” and “the elite” that defines a populist movement. This approach is discussed in great detail in *On Populist Reason* by Ernesto Laclau. Similar to the path taken in adopting a framework for securitization, this thesis considered many options for an approach regarding populism before finally adopting the one laid out in Laclau’s book.

1.2.3 Previous Studies:

Literature on the definitions of securitization and populism as well as previous studies regarding each individually are abundant. Studies connecting these two concepts, on the other hand, are more rare. One such example was a recent study entitled, “Speaking and Perceiving Security: A Case Study of the Trump Administration’s Securitization of Illegal Immigration Fueling Populism in the US.” This study provides a previous discourse analysis of some of Donald Trump’s immigration speeches and thus good suggestions of speeches to be included in the analysis for this thesis. However, this researcher chose to use the ideational approach to populism and proposed a different relationship with securitization, thus their question, analysis, and conclusions differ greatly from those in this thesis.

⁶ Kurt Weyland, “Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2019), 52.

⁷ Weyland, 53–54.

From the review of previous research on this topic, one obvious research gap was that most of the studies that include populism and securitization, apart from the bachelor thesis above, involve various European countries. Specifically, the most relevant studies were done on France, Greece, and some of the Scandinavian countries. This gap showed the necessity for this thesis as it looks at the subject in the context of the United States of America. Another very important gap that this thesis will help fill is that many of the studies did not apply the same approach to populism. In fact, some of the studies did not even clarify what they meant when referring to “populism.” While filling in these research gaps, this thesis will hopefully also spark debate over the definition of populism and encourage future research into the links between populism and securitization.

This brief introduction and literature review has explained that populism and securitization are increasingly popular concepts, which still require a lot more research. This thesis is seeking to offer a better understanding of the two concepts, especially their relation to one another. The extensive review of literature on the topic resulted in the adoption of the two definitions of these concepts for this thesis. The definition of securitization is outlined by Buzan, Weaver, and Wilde in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* and the definition of populism is laid out by Ernesto Laclau in *On Populist Reason*. These texts, and the framework provided by each, were the main sources from which the conceptual framework for this thesis was constructed. That framework and how it will be used for the analysis will be explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Conceptualizing the Securitization-Populist Relationship

Chapter two of this thesis will present the construction of the conceptual framework of this thesis to be used in the subsequent analysis. In doing so, this chapter will first highlight some of the characteristics of security discourse. Following this, the chapter will examine when securitizing discourse becomes populist discourse as well. After an examination of their discursive traits, the chapter will explore what purpose securitization and populism each serve. Finally, it will conclude with a conceptual framework that postulates how populists might use securitization to achieve populist objectives. Throughout the construction of the framework the thesis will explain the two central concepts, define key terms when they are introduced, and illustrate how the framework will be applied.

2.1 When Security Discourse Turns Populist

As was mentioned in the literature review, the conceptual framework that is used for the analysis in this thesis is rooted primarily in Ernesto Laclau's theory on populism and Securitization Theory from the Copenhagen School. This section of chapter two will explain the securitization process, demonstrate what constitutes security discourse, define populism, and illustrate when security discourse simultaneously constitutes populist discourse. Understanding what makes up the discourse of the two concepts being examined is crucial to understanding the purpose that each serves, and thus is an important first step in constructing a framework relating the two.

To aid in understanding what constitutes security discourse, this section will first explain the securitization process as described by Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. It is critical to establish the definitions of "security" or "securitization" that will be used throughout the rest of the thesis before making any assertions regarding them. The definition of "securitization" comes straight from *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. In the book they state, "The exact *definition* and *criteria* of securitization is constituted by the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects."⁸ This definition gives a solid foundation for what could be considered securitization. However, it is too general to really construct a strong conceptual framework to be used for analysis. For that reason, the coming definitions of the specific pieces of the securitization process are even more critical to understanding its surrounding discourse, its purposes, and its relationship with populism.

Securitization Theory includes various pieces in the securitization process. The first of these is the "securitizing actor." In *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* they define securitizing actors as, "Actors who securitize issues by declaring something - a referent object - existentially threatened."⁹ The second is this concept of a "referent object" which they define as, "Things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival."¹⁰ Third, there must be an "existential threat," which is much more difficult to define as there is no standard for what constitutes an existential threat. However, they argue it is something that has been framed as threatening the survival of the referent object.¹¹ Fourth, there is usually a use, or argument for the use, of "extraordinary means" or "emergency measures" to combat the threat. The authors do not offer a very strict definition of "extraordinary means" or "emergency

⁸ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 25.

⁹ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 36.

¹⁰ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 36.

¹¹ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 36.

measures.” The most that they say is that extraordinary means, “...break the normal political rules of the game (e.g., in the form of secrecy, levying taxes or conscription, placing limitations on otherwise inviolable rights, or focusing society’s energy and resources on a specific task).”¹² Finally, there is the role of an “audience,” which is the target of the securitizing move and will either accept the existential threat, thus completing the securitization of the issue, or reject it.¹³ These definitions of the components of the securitization process accentuate the theory’s highly discursive nature. Also, they help to answer the question of what constitutes security discourse because they provide a kind of road map for securitization. This road map allows for easier identification of possible links between the discourse and purposes of securitization and those of populism.

Securitization has now been precisely defined, and the securitization process has been explained. So what, then, actually comprises security discourse? Does one simply say, “security,” and thus an issue has been securitized? Buzan, Waever, and Wilde argue that it is not that simple. According to them, “What is essential (in security discourse) is the designation of an existential threat requiring emergency action or special measures and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience. There will be instances in which the word *security* appears without this logic and other cases that operate according to that logic with only a metaphorical security reference.”¹⁴ While this may seem a bit vague, the description of security discourse is narrowed slightly into what are known as “securitizing moves.”

In the view of Buzan, Waever, and Wilde, securitization is initiated by a securitizing move. This securitizing move is what is known as a speech act. A speech act can be explained as an action in which the speaking of the phrase itself carries out the action, e.g., making a promise.¹⁵ In their book, Buzan, Waever, and Wilde describe what constitutes a successful speech act as follows, “A successful speech act is a combination of language and society, of both intrinsic features of speech and the group that authorizes and recognizes that speech (Bourdieu 1991 [1982]; Butler 1996a, b).”¹⁶ Furthermore, they offer facilitating conditions for such a securitizing speech act, “(1) The demand internal to the speech act of following the grammar of security, (2) the social conditions regarding the position of authority for the securitizing actor—that is, the relationship between speaker and audience and thereby the likelihood of the audience accepting

¹² Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 24.

¹³ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 25.

¹⁴ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 27.

¹⁵ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 26.

¹⁶ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 32.

the claims made in a securitizing attempt, and (3) features of the alleged threats that either facilitate or impede securitization.”¹⁷ In other words, the success of the securitizing move is largely dependent on whether it aligns with the grammar of security discourse, the securitizing actor is in a position with authority to make a securitizing claim, and the alleged threat already has characteristics that are commonly considered threatening. The “grammar of security” is another loosely defined term from Securitization Theory, with Buzan, Wæver and Wilde only describing it as, “...constructing a plot that includes existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out.”¹⁸ In addition to this loose definition, the “features of the alleged threats that either facilitate or impede securitization” is a very vague phrase. The authors try to offer some clarity by explaining that, “It is more likely that one can conjure a security threat if certain objects can be referred to that are generally held to be threatening—be they tanks, hostile sentiments, or polluted waters.”¹⁹

Even with the establishment of these definitions, Securitization Theory seems very subjective. However, according to Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, “The label subjective is not fully adequate. Whether an issue is a security issue is not something individuals decide alone. Securitization is *intersubjective* and socially constructed.”²⁰ What they mean is that securitization is a process which relies on both a securitizing actor to present the issue as a security issue and an audience that is willing to accept their labeling of the issue as an existential threat. Regardless of whether it is subjective or intersubjective, what is important is that both of these terms exemplify the fact that many facets of the Copenhagen School’s securitization process are vague and allow room for interpretation. This vagueness and the ability to apply security to nearly any issue could be extremely useful to populists, as will be explained in the coming section on the purposes of each.

When this thesis later analyzes the immigration speeches of a political leader, the first step will be to use the Securitization Theory framework described above to establish whether there is a case of securitization. More specifically, it will examine the discourse and look for each piece of the securitization process as well as the facilitating conditions for successful securitizing speech acts. This includes the securitizing actor and their authority, the referent object(s) designated as being threatened, the alleged existential threat and its features, the calls

¹⁷ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 33.

¹⁸ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 33.

¹⁹ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 33.

²⁰ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 31.

for extraordinary measures to combat the threat, and the audience and its willingness to accept the securitizing move.

Before delving into the purposes of securitization and populism, the thesis will now examine when the security discourse described above simultaneously constitutes populist discourse. In order to do so, the thesis will scrutinize the characteristics of populist discourse for potential overlaps with those of security discourse. Figuring out where security discourse crosses over into populist discourse will help later to identify what their purposes are and how these purposes may relate. Like with “securitization” earlier in this section, it is crucial that populism is first clearly defined before any assertions are made.

As was mentioned in the literature review, there is a major debate in the academic community regarding populism. To reiterate what was already stated, the approach to populism that this thesis is utilizing is based on that of Ernesto Laclau. Laclau describes what, in his view, constitutes populism in his various works, especially *On Populist Reason*. He views populism as splitting society into two groups; “the people” versus the “dominant ideology,” “the elite,” “the institutional system,” or one of many other terms describing those who unjustly hold power over “the people.” However, unlike other approaches it is the way the group is formed that makes it populist, not the ideology. Throughout his book, he argues that “the people” is created from a number of heterogeneous groups all with varying ideologies and separate demands. The way that this is done is by creating a “chain of equivalence.” The initial feeling of equivalence stems from a common opposition to those with power, but their common opposition to the “elite” alone is not enough. These various groups must begin to view their demands as equivalent to the others’ to start to constitute a populist movement. Laclau contends that the final step to complete this chain is the emergence of an “empty signifier” to unite them by representing all their disparate demands under one term or phrase that is already one of the demands. According to Laclau the empty signifier could be anything - “freedom,” “security,” “justice,” etc. According to this approach, the newly created “people” then assert that their movement represents all of society and that they should have the power, not the “dominant ideology,” which they claim is a small minority.

Using these definitions of populism and securitization and the description of security discourse, the thesis will now present some possible overlapping traits of populist and security discourse. From the description of populism above, a characteristic that one could expect to see in populist discourse is an antagonism towards “the elites,” “the dominant ideology,” the

“institutional system,” or some other term used to describe those who are seen as having an unjust monopoly on power. Therefore, security discourse surrounding a certain issue may become populist by asserting that the issue itself is not the only threat, but that the proposed response to the issue by those with power is part of that threat. If the securitizing actor is indeed a populist, then one would likely see their discourse attempt to establish this distinction between them and the “elite.” Similarly, since “the institutional system” is considered to be part of this supposed oppressive power structure, one could expect to see discourse that attacks the liberal institutions which govern many societies for their constraining of the ability of “the people” to combat the alleged threat.

Additionally, a characteristic that security discourse could share with populist discourse is references to “the people.” While references to “the people” or some variation thereof are not unique to either security or populist discourse, creation of such a group is a precondition of populism. As such, security discourse that is also populist would likely incorporate some variation of “the people.” “The people” could fit into the securitization process as the target audience that must either accept or reject the securitization. “The people” could also be a referent object that is supposedly threatened. The “purposes” sections of this chapter will expand upon all of this, but if security discourse includes some version of “the people” versus the “elite,” then it is well on its way to becoming populist.

It is obvious that security discourse is centered around the notion of security. As has already been explained, populism requires what is known as an empty signifier to help crystallize the movement. In order for security discourse to become populist, there would need to be some use of an empty signifier. It is likely that this signifier would be some variation of “security.” If “security” ceases to simply represent “security” and begins to represent the other demands as well, then this would suggest that the discourse has become populist too. In summary, for security discourse to become populist, one would need to also see an antagonism towards the “elite” that distinguishes them from “the people,” attacks on the liberal institutions that comprise the “institutional system,” and the use of “security” or some other term as an embodiment of the heterogeneous groups and their demands.

Similar to how understanding security discourse and populist discourse assists in determining the purposes of each concept, identifying the traits that can define discourse as both security and populist discourse is key to finding where the purposes of the two overlap. The next section will use this better knowledge of securitization, populism, and their respective discourse

to identify those purposes. That will bring the thesis one step closer to having a fully constructed conceptual framework and one step closer to answering the research question.

2.2 The Purposes of Populism and Securitization

The sections on security and populist discourse have introduced the two central theories behind the conceptual framework, described the discourse of each, and established when security discourse also qualifies as populist. Since the research question is asking how populists might use securitization for their own populist purposes or objectives, the next step in this thesis is to transition from what the discourse of the theories looks like to what the purposes are.

Determining the purposes of each will help to better understand how the theories relate and allow for a better analysis of how one of these could assist in the fulfillment of the other's purposes.

The section on security discourse has already somewhat demonstrated securitization's purposes simply by explaining the theory, but these can still be more thoroughly explained. One of the purposes of securitization is alluded to by Buzan, Waever, and Wilde in one of their definitions of security, " 'Security' is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization."²¹ By severely politicizing a certain issue, one may be able to alter the entire discussion regarding that issue. Through arguing that the issue poses an existential threat, the priority of said issue can be raised above all others. In *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Buzan, Waever, and Wilde argue, "If one can argue that something overflows the normal political logic of weighing political issues against each other, this must be the case because it can upset the entire process of weighing as such: 'If we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way).'"²² To offer a very common example, the topic of immigration is often argued as an economic issue. If one securitizes immigration, the discussion can be moved to whether it poses a threat. This purpose of altering the trajectory of the discussion surrounding a certain issue sets up the next purpose of securitization.

As previously discussed, according to *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, securitization involves the invocation or discussion of significant emergency measures to deal with the alleged existential threat. Shifting the discussion by framing an issue as an existential threat, as described by the first purpose, is what legitimizes this potential use of extraordinary

²¹ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 23.

²² Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 24.

measures. In other words, “Thereby, the actor has claimed a right to handle the issue through extraordinary means, to break the normal political rules of the game (e.g., in the form of secrecy, levying taxes or conscription, placing limitations on otherwise inviolable rights, or focusing society’s energy and resources on a specific task).”²³ To continue with the example of immigration, if it is being securitized, then one might see the securitizing actor argue for ignoring asylum laws, suspending due process, or shifting a significant amount of time and resources to combat the threat. Naturally, since calls for extraordinary or emergency measures are a key piece of the securitization process, it is fair to assert that one of the purposes of securitization would be to legitimize the use of such extreme measures.

Outside of these two purposes, it can be argued that other purposes of securitization depend on the intentions of the securitizing actor and the perception of the audience. In certain cases, like the United States after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the government might claim that securitizing the issue and taking extraordinary measures was to combat existential threat posed by terrorism. However, skeptics might argue that the United States was using securitization to justify a loosening of their obligation to obey constitutional and human rights laws. Additionally, in some instances, securitization could be seen as being used by a repressive regime to undermine institutions and further consolidate power. While they are important to consider, such purposes are more difficult to attribute because, again, it is difficult to ascertain the intentions of the securitizing actor.

Next, this thesis will explore some of the purposes of populism. Similar to the portion on the purposes of securitization, some of the purposes of populism were hinted at in the description of the theory itself. First, populism is meant to turn what Laclau refers to as democratic demands, which are isolated and heterogeneous, into popular demands through a chain of equivalence. Democratic demands in this context are defined by Laclau as demands which, satisfied or not, remain isolated.²⁴ In contrast, popular demands are defined as, “A plurality of demands which, through their equivalential articulation, constitute a broader social subjectivity.”²⁵ According to Laclau, demands often start as simple requests, but may turn to claims (requiring explanation) if they remain unsatisfied.²⁶ To clarify, “demand” and “claim” are synonymous here. An example of this transition from request to claim could be unemployed factory workers requesting employment. If unemployment continues, it may become a claim for which they are requiring an

²³ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 24.

²⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London ; New York: Verso, 2005), 74.

²⁵ Laclau, 74.

²⁶ Laclau, 73–74.

explanation. Simultaneously, one group may have a claim that the government should increase social welfare, and another group may have a claim that the government should address terror attacks. Should these remain unsatisfied, the groups may begin to view their demands as equivalent due to their unfulfillment by those with power. This equivalence transforms their isolated, democratic demands into popular demands.

Further to the creation of this newly found equivalence between the demands of the groups, a second purpose of populism is to create what Laclau calls, "... an internal antagonistic frontier separating 'the people' from power."²⁷ In other words, a populist movement must be able to divide society into two camps as described in the section on populist discourse. One is the camp that has become united through an equivalential chain of popular demands known as "the people," and the other is the "elite" group or "institutional system" that "the people" view unjustly hold power and ignore their demands. Maintaining the same example from above, these three groups must not only view their demands as equivalent, but that those in power are blocking them from their rightful claim to power as the majority and the ability to fulfill their demands. Laclau states, "In order to have the 'people' of populism, we need something more: we need a plebs who claims to be the only legitimate populus."²⁸

This objective of creating an antagonistic divide is not limited to "the people" against the "elite." As was discussed in the section on populist discourse, it is also presented by Laclau through numerous other terms including "the people" versus the "institutional system." In that section it was also mentioned that populist discourse could include attacks on the liberal institutions that are argued to be keeping "the people" from power. According to Laclau, "Populism presents itself both as *subversive* of the existing state of things and as the starting point for a more or less radical *reconstruction* of a new order whenever the previous one has been shaken. The institutional system has to be (again, more or less) broken if the populist appeal is to be effective."²⁹ From this, one can reasonably argue that another purpose of populism is to fix what they believe is a "broken system" by circumventing, dismantling, and or reforming the current institutions.

Overall, it is clear that securitization and populism each serve certain purposes or have certain objectives. When it comes to securitization, one objective is to shift an issue from a political matter to one that should be considered an urgent matter of security. This objective is

²⁷ Laclau, 74.

²⁸ Laclau, 81.

²⁹ Laclau, 177.

pursuant to the further goal of legitimizing the use, or at least the proposed use, of extraordinary measures to resolve the issue. Populism has the objective of equating individual, isolated demands and uniting them into one movement. As part of this process they aim to split society into two opposing groups, with their group claiming to represent the population as a whole and accusing the other of holding power illegitimately. Identifying the various purposes that each of these theories can serve is central to answering this research question because it is now clear what each is trying to achieve. Now that the objectives of each have been determined, the thesis will use these to complete the conceptual framework by proposing conceivable ways in which populists could use securitization to accomplish their objectives.

2.3 Populists Using Securitization

This thesis has extensively covered the theories of securitization and populism including the relevant literature, the overlap in the two discourses, and the purposes that each serve. Each of the previous sections have built on each other to help arrive at the final portion of the conceptual framework of this thesis. Based on the information gathered in the previous sections, the thesis will now suggest some of the ways in which securitization could be used to aid populists in accomplishing their objectives outlined above. First, this section will examine the possible ways in which securitization can help accomplish the construction of “the people” from the heterogeneous societal groups and demands. Afterwards, it will explain how securitization may assist populists in furthering the division of “the people” from the “elite” and “institutional system.” Finally, it will look at the potential for securitization to aid in the crystallization of the movement.

From the securitization process, remember that there are referent objects that a securitizing actor has deemed to be existentially threatened by some issue. The constructivist nature of the threat and the referent objects in Securitization Theory provide a populist securitizing actor with a potentially golden opportunity to create “the people.” Earlier in the chapter, it was established that “the people” are constructed from heterogeneous groups with differing demands. It was also established that the initial feeling of equivalence between the various groups comes from a common feeling that their requests have been unfulfilled or ignored. This is where the referent objects could be particularly effective. In *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* it states that, in theory, any public issue can be securitized.³⁰ It also says,

³⁰ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 23.

“In principle, securitizing actors can attempt to construct anything as a referent object.”³¹ A populist that is attempting to use securitization to create “the people” might take note of the issues that groups are demanding be addressed in a given society. They could, perhaps, look at the polls that are frequently conducted in which voters express which issues are most important to them, or they could pay attention to social movements. After figuring out what the most pressing issues are, the securitizing actor could incorporate these into their securitizing moves. In other words, a populist could designate referent objects specific to the unmet demands of various groups in a society or label certain things as existential threats that the groups may already show disdain for.

Drawing on the example used earlier to explain the purposes of populism, if there is one group whose demand is employment, one group whose demand is to increase the social welfare system, and one group whose demand is to address terror attacks, then the securitizing actor could securitize immigration by claiming immigrants are an existential threat to national security, job security, and to the social safety net. Alternatively, they could claim that terrorism is an existential threat, and that it threatens jobs due to a decline in tourism and the social safety net by diverting government resources from social welfare programs to fighting terrorism. Regardless of which demands are designated as referent objects and which are designated as part of the threat, this suggests that securitization offers a potential mechanism for a securitizing actor to facilitate the creation of “the people” of a populist movement.

Given this description of how the disparate demands of groups could be incorporated into a securitization attempt by a populist, it is worth considering the more specific way in which this could assist in the populist goal of creating “the people.” In order for the formation of “the people” to be successful, the groups must view their demands as equivalent. While the unfulfillment of their demands may be enough to garner an initial, general feeling of equivalence, a properly constructed securitization could provide them with a stronger feeling of equivalence due to the emergence of a common threat. If all of their demands are threatened by the same thing, then this would likely increase the feeling of their demands being equivalent. This concept of a common threat will be examined further when looking at how securitization might aid in the crystallization of the movement.

Before moving on to the creation of the “elite” camp, another component from securitization that may offer a small benefit in the attempt at forming “the people” is the role of

³¹ Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 36.

the audience. For a securitizing move to be successful, the audience must accept it. If the securitizing moves have been specifically tailored to the demands of the target audience, then the likelihood of them accepting the securitization significantly increases. Since the acceptance of the securitization may aid in groups viewing their demands as equivalent, this could provide a benefit to a populist securitizing actor.

This thesis will now consider how securitization could also be used to fulfill the populist objective of forming an antagonistic relationship with a group they have labeled the “elite.” The utility of securitization for helping to create this divide is a little less straightforward than in the creation of “the people.” To begin with, securitization may help to highlight the idea that the “elite” or those with power have failed to meet the groups’ demands. The way this could be done is via the alleged threat and the referent objects. As was shown above, securitization could be used to propose action on the various demands that certain social groups have by designating them as the referent objects or existential threats. For creating antagonism toward the “elite,” a populist securitizing actor could claim that the “elite” are responsible for the existential threat, have failed to act in response to it, or are even actively benefiting from it. The ability to construct an “existential threat” and direct attention to the supposed failure of the “elite” to deal with such a serious threat could aid in building resentment towards this group among “the people” that they have supposedly failed.

Naturally, when highlighting where a supposed political adversary has failed, it would be beneficial to explain what one would do to succeed. Fortunately for populists, securitization offers a great mechanism for them to contrast themselves from the “elite.” During the securitization process, the securitizing actor is expected to take, or at least propose, extraordinary measures to combat the alleged threat. Populists, especially those that are not yet in power, could not only use securitization to show how the “elites” have failed to address their demands, but to propose politically extreme solutions that would do so. To continue with the same example of the three groups used earlier, a populist could use securitization to first argue that the current “institutional system” or the “elites” in power have failed to address the threat that immigration poses to jobs, the welfare system, and terrorism. To sharpen the divide even further, they might argue that the “elite” have been personally benefiting from immigration and are thus actively working to prevent their demands from being fulfilled. Then, they could present extreme solutions such as a halt to all immigration or suspending certain rights for immigrants. If it can be argued that the opposing camp has failed them and that the extreme measures the populists are

proposing via the securitization will fulfill the demands of the groups, then the objective of forming an antagonistic divide between “the people” and the “elite” will have been significantly advanced, if not fulfilled.

The section on security and populist discourse explained that populist discourse would likely include attacks on the liberal institutions that govern many societies, and the section discussing the purposes of populism showed that one purpose is to promote a radical reconstruction of this “institutional system.” These institutions could be argued to be framed as part of the existential threat as they constrain the ability to take the extreme actions that populists argue are needed to combat the threat. The emergency measures also provide a possible route for populists to achieve this objective. If the proposed securitization is accepted and the audience feels emergency measures are justified, then these measures can help to circumvent or even restructure the liberal institutions that constrain them. Using the same example, the liberal institutions like parliament or the court system could be argued to be preventing the addressing of the alleged threat that immigration poses because certain laws may restrict the measures they can use, or certain actions may require a lengthy debate process in parliament. Since the threat is supposedly imminent, populists would likely argue that there is a need to use mechanisms that go around these institutions or get rid of them altogether.

In addition to helping form “the people,” creating the antagonistic relationship with “the elite,” and aiding in the attempt to bypass or restructure the “institutional system,” securitization may be able to be used to help crystallize the links in the equivalential chain of demands described earlier. It was explained above that populists require what is known as an empty signifier to crystallize their movement. When examining the way that securitization can help in the formation of “the people,” it was evident that the referent objects and threats could be constructed to fit the demands of the heterogeneous groups in society. To solidify this new “people” as a populist movement, one of the demands needs to stand in to represent the totality of the demands, creating what Laclau refers to as “hegemony.” Securitization offers a great avenue for producing an empty signifier because “security” can be applied to nearly any issue that the securitizing actor wants.

Using the same three group example from before, the groups demanding combatting of terrorism, increasing social welfare, and increasing factory worker employment would need to find an empty signifier that represents all of them. While the demands of the groups are clearly heterogeneous, a securitizing actor could create “hegemony” through the common denominator

of “security.” In this case, the securitizing actor might attempt to designate job security as the empty signifier for the movement by arguing that lower unemployment numbers means fewer people relying on government assistance, and employed people are less likely to become angry with the government and commit acts of terror.

In the first part of this section, there was a brief mention about the possibility that a common threat might help in getting the groups to view the various demands as equivalent. As such, one could suggest that the most effective way for a populist securitizing actor to designate an empty signifier to represent the movement would be to construct a threat that could be argued to be related to each demand in some way. Given that the demands of a populist movement are naturally heterogeneous, the links to the empty signifier do not need to be objectively strong as long as the movement still views them all as equivalent. From all of this, it is apparent that, when it comes to accomplishing the objective of creating an empty signifier to solidify the populist movement, populists could benefit from the ability to apply “security” to nearly any issue.

To sum up, this section has been about the ways that populists might be able to utilize securitization to achieve their populist objectives. The thesis has now shown that, by making the referent objects and existential threats of a securitization correspond to a variety of unfulfilled societal demands, populists may have an exceptional apparatus for creating “the people” that constitutes their movement. Additionally, it looked at how securitizing an issue could allow populists to create, or further, the antagonistic divide between themselves (“the people”) and the “elites” by highlighting the failure of the “elites” to address the existential threat to their demands and offer a severely contrasting alternative. It also suggested that populists might use securitization to highlight the need to bypass liberal institutions and restructure the “institutional system.” Finally, the section closed by proposing how populists might use some variation of “security” as the empty signifier that crystallizes their movement.

Chapter two has provided a closer look at the potential relationship between securitization and populism through the construction of the conceptual framework of this thesis. It showed that security discourse will begin to become populist when it starts to antagonize the “elites” holding power, make references to “the people” in opposition to the “elites,” attack the “institutional system,” and use “security” as an empty signifier. It also explained that the purposes of securitization are to alter the discussion surrounding a certain issue by severely politicizing it and to justify the use of extraordinary measures. The purposes of populism provided were to create an equivalence of demands between the heterogeneous groups of society,

divide the population into the opposing camps of “the people” and “the elite,” attack and attempt to restructure the “institutional system,” and to solidify the creation of the movement with an empty signifier. The chapter ended by postulating that populists could use securitization to accomplish four populist objectives. First, it might aid in constructing “the people” through the disparate demands being designated as referent objects or threats. Second, it could help to widen the divide between “the elites” and “the people” by blaming the “elites” for the threat and offering extreme proposals in contrast. Third, by claiming that the liberal institutions that govern many societies are hindering action against the alleged existential threat, populist movements might be able to accomplish their goal of bypassing or completely restructuring the “institutional system.” Finally, “security” could take on the role of the empty signifier that populist movements need in order to crystallize. In chapter three, this thesis will use this newly constructed conceptual framework to conduct a discourse analysis on a practical example of a leader who has been labeled a populist and accused of securitizing issues. The leader’s immigration discourse will be analyzed for populist and securitizing elements, and then the thesis will discern if securitization has been used to further the populist objectives of the leader/movement as described above.

Chapter 3: Securitization-Populism Relationship in the United States

Now that chapter two has provided the necessary framework for analysis, chapter three will provide the analysis. To begin the chapter, there will be a section that covers immigration discourse under the previous two Presidents of the United States. This will help to answer the research question by providing a bit of historical context and a comparison to presidents not widely considered to be populists, but one of whom has also been accused of securitizing the same issue. Following the historical context, there will be a section that lays out the political context in which President Donald Trump’s speeches were situated. Then, the chapter will analyze how Trump has securitized the issue of immigration. After that, it will examine how he has used this securitization to further populist objectives, which will help answer the research question by providing a possible example of this proposed relationship. The chapter will end with the conclusions of this analysis.

3.1 Immigration Discourse Under Bush and Obama

To provide a better understanding of Donald Trump's securitization of immigration, it is important to offer something to compare it to. Therefore, this section of the thesis will provide a brief historical background on immigration discourse under the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. One could argue for starting even further back in the history of the country, but, for the purposes of this thesis, a 16 year period in which there was a Republican and a Democratic president provides a sufficient window into immigration discourse in the United States in the years leading up to the Trump presidency.

The presidency of George W. Bush started in 2001 following his narrow election victory in 2000. Bush's initial immigration discourse mainly addressed the need to stop illegal immigration. However, he also took the stance that immigration is part of America's identity, and that immigrants should be welcomed. This can be seen in a speech he gave on 26 June 2000, in which he says, "Latinos enrich our country with faith in God, a strong ethic of work, community & responsibility. We can all learn from the strength, solidarity, & values of Latinos. Immigration is not a problem to be solved, it is the sign of a successful nation. New Americans are to be welcomed as neighbors and not to be feared as strangers."³² At this time, the discussion surrounding immigration was almost exclusively focused on the possibility of amnesty for undocumented immigrants, and the potential for guest worker programs.

Then, Bush's presidency faced an early shock on September 11, 2001 when terrorists committed the deadliest attack on American soil, killing around 3,000 people. Naturally, such a significant act of terror would make a country reexamine its security. The Bush administration did exactly that; they put nearly all of their effort into combatting terrorism and promoting American security. Immigration was not exempt from the new scrutiny and was arguably securitized through the discourse of President Bush in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. In her thesis, Esther van't Veen argues that President Bush had a narrative of immigrants as a "dangerous other."³³ In this narrative, he associated immigrants with terrorism, gang violence, and drugs. After 9/11, he even changed the mission statement of the United States Customs and Border Protection to the following, "The priority mission of CBP is to prevent terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the United States."³⁴

³² "George W. Bush on Immigration," On The Issues, accessed May 7, 2020, https://www.ontheissues.org/Celeb/George_W__Bush_Immigration.htm.

³³ Esther van't Veen, "George W. Bush's Securitization of Immigration across the United States- Mexico Border" (Leiden University, n.d.), 30, https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/83854/Veen_van_t_CSM_2017.pdf?sequence=1.

³⁴ van't Veen, 31–32.

Along with this new narrative of fighting the threat of terrorism in the immigration system, President Bush presented the argument that immigrants in the country are a burden to the system in that they are “beyond the reach of the law” and strain the resources of the United States government.”³⁵ This argument of immigrants as an existential threat was coupled with what some might consider extraordinary measures for the time. These measures included significant increases in border forces as well as deploying the national guard, constructing fencing along parts of the border, and altering immigration law enforcement policies within the United States to be more severe. Some might argue that, because George Bush does not explicitly say that immigration is a security threat, this is not an example of securitization. However, as was pointed out in the section on security discourse, securitization does not require explicit mentions of security. There can be instances of securitization in which there is an implied reference to security as long as it follows the logic of security explained earlier. As Bush’s discourse follows this logic, including an existential threat, a point of no return, and calls for extraordinary means to solve the issue, this would be considered an example of securitizing immigration.

While this securitization was taking place, President Bush still kept his pre-9/11 immigration discourse somewhat intact. He continued to advocate for a guest worker program, and tried to maintain a positive tone on immigration by making statements like, “We hear claims that immigrants are somehow bad for the economy, even though this economy could not function without them. All these are forms of economic retreat, and they lead in the same direction, toward a stagnant and second-rate economy.”³⁶ In 2006, well into his second term as President, Bush continued to walk this tightrope of immigration as a threat and as a benefit saying, “We’re a nation of laws, and we must enforce our laws. We’re also a nation of immigrants, and we must uphold that tradition, which has strengthened our country in so many ways. These are not contradictory goals.”³⁷ The concept of being a “nation of laws and a nation immigrants” provides the perfect transition into the immigration discourse of the next President, Barack Obama.

One would guess that, as a member of the opposing political party of George Bush, President Obama’s immigration discourse would be different. To a certain extent, President Obama tried to perform the same balancing act that President Bush did. According to J. David Cisneros, “Obama’s immigration rhetoric is structured around a basic dichotomy between the United States as “a nation of immigrants” and “a nation of laws,” and it relies extensively on

³⁵ van’t Veen, 33.

³⁶ “George W. Bush on Immigration.”

³⁷ “George W. Bush on Immigration.”

stories of exemplary immigrants.”³⁸ However, Obama struck a more positive tone than that of President Bush. President Obama’s immigration discourse often focused more on all of the benefits that immigration has provided to the United States. As the above quotation states, President Obama frequently used anecdotes of “model” immigrants. Obama would mention famous stories like those of Nikola Tesla, Albert Einstein, Andrew Carnegie, and Sergey Brin to show the truly fantastic things immigrants can accomplish. When he did mention the unskilled laborers, it was usually in passing and very unspecific; but he still underscored the necessity for them nonetheless.³⁹ It was not just successful entrepreneurs that Obama pointed to as a defense of immigration. He also lauded “responsible” immigrants like those who have served admirably in the military despite their immigration status. In Cisneros’s words, “In his public discourse, Obama provided another archetype of the exemplary immigrant, the military service member, who, in contrast to the entrepreneur, provided a different model for neoliberal responsibility and self-management.”⁴⁰

For all of his positivity and praise of exemplary immigrants, President Obama’s discourse, when it comes to being a “nation of laws,” is quite similar to that of President Bush. Obama was against a sweeping amnesty because he believed it would encourage more illegal immigration. He also highlighted some of the issues that illegal immigrants living in the United States might cause, “But because they live in the shadows, they’re vulnerable to unscrupulous businesses who pay them less than the minimum wage or violate worker safety rules, thereby putting companies who follow those rules and Americans who rightly demand the minimum wage or overtime at an unfair advantage [disadvantage]*.”⁴¹ Obama’s use of “living in the shadows” is a great example of the similarities between his and his predecessor’s immigration rhetoric as it was a phrase used frequently by Bush when describing illegal immigrants. Also, his frequent reminder of the inequity being done upon those trying to legally immigrate is consistent with President Bush’s discourse and, more than likely, many presidents before them. Although he showed a willingness to address some of the downsides that come with illegal immigration, arguing that he securitized immigration does not seem consistent with his discourse. In fact, according to Arslan Batuhan, President Obama did just the opposite. He argues:

³⁸ J. David Cisneros, “A Nation of Immigrants and a Nation of Laws: Race, Multiculturalism, and Neoliberal Exception in Barack Obama’s Immigration Discourse: A Nation of Immigrants,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8, no. 3 (September 2015): 361, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12088>.

³⁹ Cisneros, 363.

⁴⁰ Cisneros, 365.

⁴¹ Barack Obama, “Remarks at American University,” The American Presidency Project, July 1, 2010, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-american-university-0>.

In conclusion, Obama made speech acts on societal, economic and military sectors but his speech acts did not present undocumented immigrants as threats to these areas. He politicized the issue and urged citizens to demand comprehensive immigration and politicians to unite and create the reform. However, while discussing the nonregistration of immigrants, President Obama did not demonstrate them as threats instead considered this a status problem that needed to be responded with a comprehensive immigration system. Hence, his speech acts serve the purpose of the desecuritization of Latin American immigration in the USA.⁴²

Overall, President Obama's discourse on immigration could be argued to have been more compassionate than President Bush's, as he frequently lauded immigrants and did not securitize the issue. However, like his predecessor, he also highlighted some of the potential problems that may accompany immigration.

To conclude, this section has given a brief historical view of the immigration discourse in the United States since the beginning of the 21st century. Under both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama, there was a common narrative of being a "nation of laws and a nation of immigrants." In other words, they acknowledged the contributions that immigrants have made and continue to make in the United States, but that it is their job to enforce the law. President Bush's discourse fell more onto the securitization and law enforcement side of the fence, while Obama's fell more to the "nation of immigrants" side. The information provided in this section will help to answer the research question by offering something to compare Trump's discourse as well as his use of extraordinary means to. Not only are they former presidents of the same country, but one of them arguably securitized the same issue in the past. However, neither of the two presidents' immigration discourse could be considered populist.

3.2 Political Context

It is evident, from the previous section, that migration has been securitized before by President George W. Bush. When Donald Trump announced his bid for the presidency, it soon became clear that he and his campaign had decided that they would engage in the same practice. Before shifting into the analysis of Donald Trump's immigration discourse, the speeches must first be placed into the proper context. The previous section has already provided sufficient historical

⁴² Batuhan Arslan, "The Securitization of Latin American Immigrants in the USA: A Comparative Case Study of Obama and Trump Administrations" (The Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University, 2019), 58–59, <http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12623978/index.pdf>.

context for analyzing the speeches, but now there must be some context regarding the political landscape of the United States.

Donald Trump delivered these speeches from 2015 through 2020, both on the campaign trail leading up to his election and throughout his first term as President. Trump ran his presidential campaign as a financially successful businessman and political outsider. During his campaign, he constantly attacked the “elite” ruling class and what he called a “rigged system,” which is a central characteristic of populism and will be expanded upon later. His campaign was also atypical in that he constantly made politically incorrect comments that most politicians would not dare to utter. Not only did his campaign have a unique strategy, but Donald Trump is also a uniquely unpopular candidate and President. He lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton in 2016 by roughly three million votes and is the first president in modern history to not have his average approval rating reach over 50%.⁴³ Despite this overall unpopularity, he still remains very popular among Republicans, which may be explained by the political polarization discussed below.

The American political landscape during the time period in which these speeches were delivered can be described as severely polarized. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, “As of 2015, 53% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents had political values that were mostly or consistently conservative, up from 31% in 2004. While Republicans have shifted to the right, Democrats have shifted to the left: In 2015, 60% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents had values that were mostly or consistently liberal, compared with 49% in 2004 and just 30% in 1994.”⁴⁴ Another 2016 Pew Research Center study found that this partisanship is deeper than just simple ideological disagreements with 45% of Republicans and 41% of Democrats saying the other party’s policies threaten the well-being of the nation.⁴⁵

The issue of immigration is no exception to this political polarization. In June of 2016, a Pew Research Center study found that, while only 65% of Clinton supporters said that immigration would be “very important” to their vote, 79% of Trump supporters labeled this as

⁴³ Nate Silver, “How Popular Is Donald Trump?,” *FiveThirtyEight*, accessed June 7, 2020, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>.

⁴⁴ John Gramlich, “America’s Political Divisions in 5 Charts,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), November 7, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/07/americas-political-divisions-in-5-charts/>.

⁴⁵ “Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016,” *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy* (blog), June 22, 2016, <https://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/>.

“very important.”⁴⁶ Alongside the importance of immigration to conservatives are the negative feelings that some of them have towards immigrants. According to a 2016 Pew Research poll, 42% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents believe undocumented immigrants are more likely to commit serious crimes than citizens, and 28% believe they are not as honest or hard-working; this contrasts with just 15% and 10% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents saying the same.⁴⁷ The extreme political polarization in the United States in general and specifically on the topic of immigration might suggest that the target audience of Donald Trump was not the entire voting population, but rather the conservative segment of the population. This is an important consideration when analyzing Trump’s securitizing moves and the audience’s willingness to accept them.

In the lead up to the 2016 election, the United States, in the view of Trump and his supporters was not only suffering from severe polarization, but also a broken system. This is not only present in Trump’s rhetoric about a rigged system, but also in the polls. In a 2016 CNN exit poll, 57% of Trump voters said that they were either angry or dissatisfied with the federal government.⁴⁸

Another factor that should be acknowledged is the man who is responsible for writing most of Trump’s speeches, White House Director of Speechwriting, Stephen Miller. Miller is an immigration hardliner who is reportedly responsible for some of the Trump Administration’s most extreme immigration policies that will be discussed later.⁴⁹ Miller also has reported ties to far-right, white nationalist ideology.⁵⁰ With Miller, who reportedly holds great influence over Trump’s immigration policy, as the Director of Speechwriting it would not be surprising for Trump’s speeches to include anti-immigrant sentiment and attempt to securitize immigration.⁵¹

This section has provided a brief, but thorough, description of the recent political landscape in the United States. It is characterized by a President that is unique in his demeanor, his strategy, and his unpopularity. The politics of the country are also characterized by

⁴⁶ “Top Voting Issues in 2016 Election,” *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy* (blog), July 7, 2016, <https://www.people-press.org/2016/07/07/4-top-voting-issues-in-2016-election/>.

⁴⁷ “On Immigration Policy, Partisan Differences but Also Some Common Ground,” *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy* (blog), August 25, 2016, <https://www.people-press.org/2016/08/25/on-immigration-policy-partisan-differences-but-also-some-common-ground/>.

⁴⁸ “2016 Election Results: Exit Polls,” n.d., <http://2016.elections.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls>.

⁴⁹ Michal Kranz and Ellen Cranley, “Meet Stephen Miller, the 34-Year-Old White House Adviser Who’s Being Called to Resign after Leaked Emails Showed Him Sharing White Supremacist Links,” *Business Insider*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/who-is-stephen-miller-trump-speechwriter-immigration-adviser-2018-1>.

⁵⁰ Kranz and Cranley.

⁵¹ Kranz and Cranley.

hyperpartisanship and a conservative faction that has an unfavorable view of immigration and government. This will help in answering the research question because it gives some insight into who Trump's target audience is and what their views on immigration and government are. Context is an essential part of conducting a proper discourse analysis. Therefore, it is imperative to keep all of these contextual elements in mind when reading the next sections.

3.3 Trump's Securitization

This section will examine a selection of speeches given by Donald Trump to show how he has securitized immigration. In chapter two, it was established that securitization requires a securitizing actor, a referent object that is allegedly threatened, calls for extraordinary measures, and an audience willing to accept it. Additionally, it is important to remember that there were also three facilitating conditions of a successful securitizing speech act: security grammar, the position of authority of the securitizing actor, and the features of the alleged threats. This thesis will now break down Donald Trump's securitization of immigration into a brief discussion of the securitizing actor, examples of referent objects President Trump claims are existentially threatened by immigration, the extraordinary measures proposed, and the role of the audience. This is necessary to answer the research question because if it is not shown that he has securitized the issue, then it would obviously be impossible for him to have used securitization in furtherance of populist objectives.

The first component of the securitization process to be analyzed here is the securitizing actor. In this case, it is President of the United States, Donald J. Trump. Trump was the presidential nominee for the Republican Party when initiating some of the securitizing moves and during others he was the president. The presidential nominee helps to shape the platform for one of the two major political parties in the United States, and the president of the United States obviously holds great sway over what the immigration policies of the country will be. Therefore, while making his securitizing moves, Donald Trump definitely satisfied the facilitating condition of making the claim from a position of authority.

Unlike the securitizing actor, the referent object that is supposedly under threat changes throughout Donald Trump's speeches. In many cases there are even multiple referent objects in one speech. One of the more common referent objects used by Trump is the "state," which is not surprising as Buzan, Waever, and Wilde refer to the state as the traditional referent object for

security.⁵² Some of the other referent objects that Trump claims are existentially threatened by immigration include the economy or jobs, the American people, social programs, and the healthcare system. To help exemplify Trump's securitization of migration, this thesis will now dissect a few examples of him designating these various referent objects as being existentially threatened.

One example of him designating the state as an existentially threatened referent object is in his remarks following a mass shooting at a gay night club in June, 2016. In the speech he offers condolences to the victims and a reminder that it was a radical Islamist terror attack. He then says, "If we don't get tough, and we don't get smart – and fast – we're not going to have a country anymore -- there will be nothing left."⁵³ Following this remark, he immediately begins explaining how this attack is a result of a, "...dysfunctional immigration system which does not permit us to know who we let into our country, and it does not permit us to protect our citizens."⁵⁴ In the same speech, and others, he provides what he considers to be a solution to the problem: a ban on immigration from countries with a "proven history of terrorism." Given his previous rhetoric regarding Muslim people, many argued that this was simply an attempt to ban Muslims from immigrating to the United States. The proposed ban could be considered an extreme measure, as defined by the Copenhagen School, because it was condemned by many other mainstream politicians at the time and was ruled in lower federal courts to be in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This example alone is an attempt at securitizing migration via a speech act as described by the Copenhagen School. Following the grammar of security, Trump makes a clear designation of the referent object - the country - as being existentially threatened with its complete destruction. He continues with this grammar by arguing that if significant action is not taken immediately, it will be too late. Finally, he proposes an extreme measure that is beyond what is considered normally politically acceptable as the solution. This speech act checks the final box of facilitating conditions for success because Trump links terrorism with immigration, and terror attacks obviously have inherently threatening features.

As mentioned above, Donald Trump did not just claim that immigration is a threat to the state. He also developed a pattern of labeling the economy or American jobs as existentially

⁵² Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 36.

⁵³ Donald Trump, "Remarks at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire," The American Presidency Project, June 13, 2016,

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-saint-anselm-college-manchester-new-hampshire-0>.

⁵⁴ Trump.

threatened. During the annual State of the Union address on 5 February 2019, President Trump said, “Now, Republicans and Democrats must join forces again to confront an urgent national crisis... The lawless state of our southern border is a threat to the safety, security, and financial wellbeing of all America. We have a moral duty to create an immigration system that protects the lives and jobs of our citizens.”⁵⁵ In between these two statements, Mr. Trump explains that he has sent 3,750 troops to the border to deal with a group of migrants coming from South and Central America to the United States, which he describes as a “tremendous onslaught.”⁵⁶ Just like in the previous example, there is an obvious use of security grammar. In this instance, the referent object includes the financial well-being and jobs of America, and he claims that it is threatened so seriously and immediately by the immigration system that it deserves to be labeled an urgent crisis which must be confronted. His proposed response to the scenario was troops being sent to the border and the completion of a Southern border wall. While a fence already exists on the southern border and previous presidents have deployed the national guard to support border enforcement, these could be considered extreme measures based on the significant amount of money and effort Trump wanted to invest and the use of active duty military personnel inside the United States. To highlight the extremity of the measures in comparison to past measures, Trump was asking for multiple billions of dollars more than Bush had spent on the fence and even declared a national emergency to shift an extra 2.5 billion USD from military funds. As for using active duty military instead of the national guard, it is stated in the United States Constitution that active duty military personnel cannot be used to enforce the law inside the country without invoking the Insurrection Act of 1807 meant for dealing with insurrection and rebellion. When it comes to the features of the supposed threat, economic competition with migrants is less threatening in the traditional sense. However, economic hardship is a serious concern to many, and when it is surrounded in the speech by the argument that immigration is also a threat to their lives, the concept of immigration takes on a more traditionally threatening connotation.

On top of these referent objects, there are multiple occasions in which President Trump recites a whole list of referent objects that he argues are threatened by immigration. One such example of this was in a campaign speech in Phoenix, Arizona on 31 August 2016. In the speech he says, “We are in the middle of a jobs crisis, a border crisis, and a terrorism crisis. All energies

⁵⁵ Donald Trump, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” The American Presidency Project, February 5, 2019, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union-26>.

⁵⁶ Trump.

of the federal government and the legislative process must now be focused on immigration security. That is the only conversation we should be having at this time.”⁵⁷ He then insists that these are “matters of life and death” and that this is the last chance to act before it is too late.⁵⁸ Just like the other examples above, Trump’s speech follows the same security grammar by claiming these referent objects are under immediate threat, asserting that this is the last chance to act, and proposing some of his politically extreme solutions. When making claims that these referent objects are existentially threatened by immigration, Trump makes sure to include traditionally threatening topics like terrorism and drug cartels as part of immigration to give his claim more credibility. This linking of terrorism, drug cartels, the economy, and the public welfare system will prove to be quite significant in the coming section on how securitization has been used for populist objectives.

In Securitization Theory, securitization must include a call for extreme measures to combat the existential threat. Some of the extreme measures suggested by Donald Trump such as a ban on immigration from muslim majority countries, deploying active military to the border, and constructing a border wall were covered in the examples above. However, in order to make a stronger argument that he has securitized immigration, it is important to highlight that there are more measures that have been suggested and adopted. One extreme measure Trump has suggested was the ending of birthright citizenship, which is outlined in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. Since its ratification in 1788, there have been only 27 successful amendments to the Constitution, and only one of these was repealed. Given the rarity of occurrence and the level of difficulty, suggesting an alteration of a constitutional amendment would be an extreme measure in the United States.

Similarly, on 24 June 2018, President Trump suggested the suspension of the right to due process granted by the Fifth and 14th Amendments to the Constitution by tweeting, “We cannot allow all of these people to invade our Country. When somebody comes in, we must immediately, with no Judges or Court Cases, bring them back from where they came.”⁵⁹ This is

⁵⁷ Donald Trump, “Remarks on Immigration at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona,” The American Presidency Project, August 31, 2016,

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-immigration-the-phoenix-convention-center-phoenix-arizona>.

⁵⁸ Trump.

⁵⁹ “(19) Donald J. Trump on Twitter: ‘We Cannot Allow All of These People to Invade Our Country. When Somebody Comes in, We Must Immediately, with No Judges or Court Cases, Bring Them Back from Where They Came. Our System Is a Mockery to Good Immigration Policy and Law and Order. Most Children Come without Parents...’ / Twitter,” Twitter, accessed April 27, 2020,

https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1010900865602019329?ref_url=https%3a%2f%2ftime.com%2f5321318%2fdonald-trump-immigration-due-process%2f.

another instance of the President advocating for a policy in direct contradiction of the Constitution and a Supreme Court ruling that due process applies to non-citizens as well.

Another example was the zero tolerance family separation policy through which the United States government detained immigrant children separately from their parents and did not let them remain in contact. It was a policy that was reportedly recommended by his radical speech writer Stephen Miller. This policy was changed after a significant amount of public outrage from people of all political backgrounds. The widespread condemnation and numerous lawsuits surrounding this policy would suggest that it was quite an extreme measure.

One instance where President Trump not only advocated for emergency measures but actually enacted them was his declaration of a national emergency on 15 February 2019. His declaration allowed him access to funds that had been appropriated by Congress for other purposes in order to construct the border wall. This was his way of circumventing Congress's power to appropriate funds because they would not agree to provide funding for a wall on the border. Declaring a national emergency to work around another coequal branch of government is clearly an extraordinary measure. These are just a few of the most significant examples of Trump's advocating for, and use of, extreme measures outside what would normally be politically acceptable. His promotion of these policies is a central part of the argument that he has securitized immigration.

The final piece of the securitization equation to be examined is that of the audience. It was acknowledged above that the audience plays a role in the securitization of an issue because they either accept or reject the securitization. In the case of Donald Trump securitizing immigration, there is a question about who exactly the audience is. As a Presidential candidate and as President of the United States, the first assumption would be that his audience is the American people. Trump's speeches would seem to support this assumption as he frequently says that he is fighting for the "working people," the "American people," or some other form of "the people." Although, these uses of "the people" are likely not referring to the entirety of the population. During a presidential primary election, the audience is the electorate of the party one is a member of. Naturally, Trump's immigration policies were initially tailored to win the vote of the more conservative Republican Party. The poll cited above shows that Republican voters have a more negative view of immigrants and support stricter immigration policies like those proposed by Donald Trump. The fact that his rhetoric on immigration and his policy proposals did not change at all after the primary election suggests that his target audience for securitizing

immigration was not the American people, but the conservative faction of the country. This would make more sense because a successful securitization requires an audience willing to accept it. Thus, if the audience already has a negative view of immigrants, then the attempt at securitizing immigration is much more likely to succeed. In this instance, it did succeed as many of Trump's extreme measures became widely popular among conservatives. The audience clearly plays a key role in the securitization of immigration, and the section on populism using securitization will show why the relationship with the target audience is also very useful to populist movements.

In this section of the thesis it was explained how Donald Trump has securitized immigration in accordance with the process outlined by Securitization Theory. From when he first declared his candidacy for President of the United States, through his time in office, Donald Trump has been securitizing the issue of immigration in the United States via securitizing speech acts. The section first examined Mr. Trump's role as a securitizing actor speaking from a position of great authority. Then, through examples of securitizing moves, it showed Trump's designation of certain referent objects as threatened by immigration. After, it exemplified Mr. Trump's many calls for extreme measures, outside of what is normally politically acceptable, to repel this threat. Finally, it analyzed the role of the audience, and their acceptance of his securitization.

Coupled with the parts of the securitization process, it illustrated that Mr. Trump met the facilitating conditions for a successful security speech act. The first of which is that he speaks from a position of authority that provides an increased likelihood of the audience accepting his securitizing moves, which the positions of presidential nominee and president would qualify as. The provided examples then demonstrated that Trump has met the second condition by following the pattern of security grammar in his securitizing moves. More specifically, he argues that immigration poses an imminent threat to various referent objects, and that if extreme actions are not taken immediately, then it will be too late. The last condition, the alleged threat having threatening features, was also met by always linking immigration to terrorism, cartels, murder, or some other concept that has more inherently threatening features. It is important to reiterate that this thesis only highlighted a few examples of securitizing moves, and that there are many more, which collectively form an overarching pattern of securitizing immigration. Understanding the ways in which a leader such as President Trump has securitized an issue, is necessary in order to understand how they may have used it to complete populist goals. In the following section, the

thesis will analyze how this process of securitization has been used by President Trump to aid in accomplishing populist objectives.

3.4 Trump's Use of Securitization for Populist Objectives

After creating a conceptual framework for the potential relationship between securitization and populism and confirming Donald Trump's securitization of immigration, the next part of this thesis will look at how Donald Trump has used the securitization of immigration to accomplish populist objectives as was laid out in the framework. This will be done through a discourse analysis of the same speeches that were used to analyze Trump's securitization. First, it will look at how securitization has helped to create an equivalence of various demands, which has assisted in Trump's creation of "the people" in the United States. Then, it will analyze how this securitization of immigration has allowed Trump to further develop an antagonism between "the people" and "power" that is essential to populist movements. Next, it will examine Trump's use of securitization to attack the "institutional system." Finally, it will consider how Donald Trump's use of securitization of immigration facilitated the creation of an empty signifier, solidifying his populist movement.

In *On Populist Reason*, Ernesto Laclau explains that one of the preconditions of populism is, "An equivalential articulation of demands making the emergence of the 'people' possible." In the framework that was constructed earlier in the thesis, it was suggested that populists could match the referent objects and alleged threat in securitization to various demands in a society in order to help create "the people." Through his securitization of immigration, Donald Trump articulates various demands that groups in society are demanding be addressed as equivalent and thus begins to form "the people." The articulation of the equivalent demands can be seen in the form of the referent objects that Mr. Trump claims are threatened by immigration and the framing of the threat. In the prior section, it was stated that, in his attempt to securitize immigration, Trump has designated multiple referent objects including, but not limited to, the country, the economy, the American people, the social welfare system, and healthcare. There were already specific examples provided above of the use of a few of these referent objects, but, in order to provide a better view of the chain of equivalence formed by Trump, this thesis will now offer some examples of the other referent objects.

In the first example, President Trump states that there is a crisis on the Southern border and immediately follows it up by saying, "Illegal immigration hurts American workers; burdens

American taxpayers; and undermines public safety; and places enormous strain on local schools, hospitals, and communities in general, taking precious resources away from the poorest Americans who need them most.”⁶⁰ This is not the only time he discusses these referent objects in the speech. He also says, “The Democrat Party's vision is to offer them free health care, free welfare, free education, and even the right to vote. You and the hard-working taxpayers of our country will be asked to pick up the entire tab.”⁶¹ This becomes a common theme in his speeches that involve immigration. He repeatedly mentions the crisis or existential threat that immigration poses. Then, he chooses one or a few referent objects to talk about. He asserts that, without secure borders, the immigrants will take jobs from Americans, drive down wages, take advantage of government programs like public schooling or food stamps, overburden the healthcare system, endanger American lives, and even destroy the country altogether.

His repeated use of these referent objects is unlikely by accident. A significant amount of polling was conducted prior to the 2016 presidential election. One poll from the Pew Research Center was designed to assess which topics were most important to the American electorate. Among Trump supporters, 90% said the economy was “very important,” 89% said terrorism, 79% said immigration, 79% said foreign policy, 71% said healthcare, and 68% said social security.⁶² Upon closer inspection, these numbers correlate almost exactly with Trump’s selection of referent objects and his framing of the immigration threat. He utilized the narrative that immigration threatens employment and wages to incorporate the economy. The concern of terrorism was used, not as a referent object, but as an inherent piece of the alleged immigration threat. The issue of immigration was obviously branded as the existential threat. Healthcare is included through the narrative that immigrants will overwhelm hospitals, and that they will strain government welfare programs like Medicaid. Finally, social security is not directly incorporated into the narrative, but it falls under the umbrella of the claim that social welfare programs will be strained, and taxpayers will pay for it.

This list of important topics can be considered a wide range of popular demands as described by Laclau. Just as was suggested in the conceptual framework, by securitizing immigration and claiming that all of these different topics are either threatened by or are part of an existential threat posed by immigration, Donald Trump created, at the very least, a semblance

⁶⁰ Donald Trump, “Remarks on Illegal Immigration and Border Security and an Exchange With Reporters,” The American Presidency Project, November 1, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-illegal-immigration-and-border-security-and-exchange-with-reporters>.

⁶¹ Trump.

⁶² “Top Voting Issues in 2016 Election.”

of equivalence between the many disparate demands and groups. This equation of the heterogeneous, individual demands into one chain helped to begin to form “the people.” This formation of “the people” is a critical piece of the populist puzzle, and, as Trump’s example of using the referent objects and threats in a securitization confirms, securitization can be a useful tool for the formation of this group.

As has been explained in this thesis multiple times, the target audience of a securitization is important to the process because they are the ones who decide whether or not to accept said securitization. It was suggested in the framework that one might see the utilization of a securitization to help further the viewing of the demands as equivalent because an acceptance of a securitization with multiple demands acknowledges that these demands have an equal right to survival and have been equally unfulfilled. When Donald Trump is making his securitization pitch to his target audience he establishes the various referent objects above based on their demands. President Trump tailoring the referent objects to their demands made it significantly more likely that they would accept it. When Donald Trump’s target audience accepted his securitization of immigration, they provided their agreement that the list of referent objects or demands are indeed threatened and have a right to survival. In doing so, they have strengthened the sense that all of these demands have been equally unfulfilled. The acceptance of the securitization is, by extension, an acceptance of the various demands as being equal, which is a critical juncture in the formation of a populist movement. As Laclau puts it, “A plurality of demands which, through their equivalential articulation, constitute a broader social subjectivity we will call *popular demands* - they start, at a very incipient level, to constitute the ‘people’ as a potential historical actor. Here we have, in embryo, a populist configuration.”⁶³

Throughout the speeches analyzed for this thesis, Trump frequently offers a reminder that some variation of the “American people,” “the people,” “American workers,” “the working class,” etc. will be the ones bearing the brunt of the burden of the immigration threat. Simultaneously, Mr. Trump introduces and condemns those that oppose “the people,” the “elite ruling class.” Similar to “the people,” Trump assigns many different names to this group. He refers to them as “the elite,” “special interests,” “media elites,” “donors,” and “politicians,” amongst other phrases. The creation of these two groups is extremely important. Above it was shown how securitization helped in the creation of “the people,” and now the thesis will look at

⁶³ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 74.

an example of how securitization aids in the creation of an antagonistic divide between the two camps.

According to Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*, a second precondition of populism is, "The formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating 'the people' from power."⁶⁴ In the conceptual framework, it was proposed that populists could use the extraordinary means in a securitization to aid in the creation of that antagonistic divide between "the people" and the "elite" by contrasting the response of the two groups to the alleged threat. Donald Trump did exactly that. His securitizing of immigration allowed him to easily accomplish this objective because of this ability to contrast his extreme immigration policies and suggested measures with the policies that he assigns to the "elite." From the section on Trump's securitization of immigration, it is evident that he has proposed very extreme solutions. While proposing his extreme measures, Trump also made a habit of comparing it to the opposition's plan. Though it is difficult, one must disregard the truth of the statements made about the opposition and simply look at the way the statement is used to differentiate between the two groups. One perfect example of this is from a 2016 speech in Phoenix, Arizona when then candidate Trump said:

The truth is, our immigration system is worse than anyone realizes. But the facts aren't known because the media won't report on them, the politicians won't talk about them, and the special interests spend a lot of money trying to cover them up. Today you will get the truth. The fundamental problem with the immigration system in our country is that it serves the needs of wealthy donors, political activists and powerful politicians. Let me tell you who it doesn't serve: it doesn't serve you, the American people.⁶⁵

This example shows him splitting the country into the two camps using the issue of immigration. Soon after this quote, he claims that the "elite" camp's idea of immigration reform involves open borders, lower wages, and amnesty for those in the country illegally. This is followed by him saying the policies should address the concerns of the "working people" and explaining how his extreme proposals would do exactly that. This is a common tactic used in Trump's speeches to illuminate the divide between the two camps.

Just like his use of securitization did not disappear after he was elected, his use of it to keep the two camps divided did not either. In his 2019 State of the Union address, he says:

⁶⁴ Laclau, 74.

⁶⁵ Trump, "Remarks on Immigration at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona."

No issue better illustrates the divide between America's working class and America's political class than illegal immigration. Wealthy politicians and donors push for open borders while living their lives behind walls, and gates, and guards. Meanwhile, working-class Americans are left to pay the price for mass illegal migration: reduced jobs, lower wages, overburdened schools, hospitals that are so crowded you can't get in, increased crime, and a depleted social safety net.⁶⁶

Again, in this address, he offers his extreme solutions, in contrast to those of the opposition, as a way of keeping their dichotomic relationship and his populist movement intact. Trump repeatedly shows the usefulness of securitization as a way of drawing a distinction between a populist movement and its supposed adversary.

The conceptual framework also suggested that populists would use the “extraordinary means” of securitization to attack liberal institutions that they say constrain them in order to bypass and or attempt to restructure the “institutional system” described by Laclau. This was because, as Laclau explained, in order for the populist appeal to be effective, the system needs to be somewhat broken. Trump’s repeated claims of a rigged system, his movement’s slogan of “Make America great again,” and the CNN exit poll cited in the political context shows that Trump’s movement had this view of the “institutional system” in the United States.

As such, it is not surprising that Donald Trump attempted to do this as well via his securitization of immigration. One prominent example of this was his constant attacks on the U.S. Congress for not appropriating funds for his border wall, and the subsequent declaration of a national emergency to bypass this coequal branch of government. His attacks were not just limited to Congress. He also frequently criticizes the Judicial Branch of the United States government. Though it is the third coequal branch of government and supposed to be unbiased, he frequently questions their decisions and motives regarding his policies. In his remarks after declaring the national emergency, he complains, “And we will have a national emergency, and we will then be sued, and they will sue us in the Ninth Circuit, even though it shouldn't be there. And we will possibly get a bad ruling, and then we'll get another bad ruling. And then, we'll end up in the Supreme Court, and hopefully, we'll get a fair shake.”⁶⁷ In addition to this, there was the instance where he questioned the impartiality of a federal judge due to his Mexican heritage even though he was a citizen born in the United States. These are only a couple of examples of

⁶⁶ Trump, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union.”

⁶⁷ Donald Trump, “Remarks on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Southern Border of the United States and an Exchange With Reporters,” The American Presidency Project, February 15, 2019, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-declaring-national-emergency-concerning-the-southern-border-the-united-states-and>.

Trump's constant complaints about the other branches of government and their abilities to constrain him from combating the alleged threat posed by immigration. His arguments to circumvent Congress's authority and questioning of the judiciary displays his contempt for liberal institutions and aligns with another one of the pieces of the conceptual framework.

The final purpose that securitization can serve for populists is as an empty signifier for their movement. In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau says, "If an equivalential link is going to be established between them (demands), some kind of common denominator has to be found which embodies the totality of the series. Since this common denominator has to come from the series itself, it can only be an individual demand which, for a set of circumstantial reasons, acquires a certain centrality."⁶⁸ This common denominator is the empty signifier and is necessary to crystallize the chain of equivalence formed by the various demands. The conceptual framework suggested that if a populist were to use securitization to help create an empty signifier, it would likely be something involving the term "security."

The equivalential chain that Trump was able to form through his designation of various referent objects and alleged threats was solidified by the common denominator of "border security" or "immigration security." In other words, the numerous individual demands such as economic/job security, national security, healthcare, and social welfare programs expressed by the movement were united and represented by the empty signifier of "border security." The idea being that all of these demands are equivalent, and if border security is not achieved then the other demands cannot be fulfilled either. As evidence of this, in his speeches Trump constantly stresses the need for secure borders, i.e., ending illegal immigration. Then he makes comments such as, "Illegal immigration affects the lives of all Americans. Illegal immigration hurts American workers; burdens American taxpayers; and undermines public safety; and places enormous strain on local schools, hospitals, and communities in general, taking precious resources away from the poorest Americans who need them most. Illegal immigration costs our country billions and billions of dollars each year."⁶⁹ Without this empty signifier of "border security" solidifying the link of the heterogeneous groups and their demands, the populist movement would not exist and each of the demands would remain distinct from one another. Mr. Trump's use of "border security" as an empty signifier gives credence to the assertion from the conceptual framework that populists can use securitization to create an empty signifier that crystallizes their movement.

⁶⁸ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 95.

⁶⁹ Trump, "Remarks on Illegal Immigration and Border Security and an Exchange With Reporters."

Now that this chapter has applied the conceptual framework from chapter two to the example of Donald Trump's securitization of immigration in the United States, the thesis will summarize the conclusions of that analysis. The first conclusion was that he had clearly securitized the issue of immigration, easily meeting all the requirements of the Copenhagen School's definition. Trump met the requirement of a securitizing actor through his use of securitizing moves on immigration. He met the requirement of alleging an existential threat to referent objects by labeling immigration as an existential threat to a long list of referent objects including jobs/economy, national security, healthcare, and others. President Trump also met the condition of a proposal of extraordinary measures to combat the alleged threat by proposing policies that were shown to be much more extreme than usually politically acceptable through a comparison to those of his two predecessors. The final requirement, a target audience that accepted the securitization, was met by a large majority of the conservative segment of America's population voting for him and expressing their support for his policies. Not only did he meet these requirements, but his securitization also met the facilitating conditions of successful securitizing moves. As a presidential candidate and President of the United States, he was speaking from a position with significant authority to make such claims; his speech acts followed the grammar of security briefly described by Securitization Theory; and he made sure that the alleged threat always had traditionally threatening features by linking it to drug cartels, terrorism, etc. Establishing that President Trump has securitized the issue of immigration was just the first conclusion drawn in this thesis, and it provided the foundation for the second part.

Following the analysis of Mr. Trump's securitization of immigration, the thesis analyzed how this securitization was used to achieve populist objectives. The conclusion of this analysis was that President Trump's securitization of immigration aided in the formation and sustainment of a "populist movement" in accordance with the conceptual framework laid out in chapter two of this thesis. The thesis explained that Trump's choice of referent objects corresponded almost exactly with the most important issues amongst voters. This suggested that the demands of the voters were used as referent objects in order to create a greater sense of equivalence among the groups through their common unfulfillment and common threat posed by immigration. In other words, it helped to create the equivalential chain of demands that is necessary to form "the people" of a populist movement. In addition, President Trump's securitization was shown to have assisted in the antagonistic dividing of society into "the people" and "the elite" that is characteristic of populism. This was done through the proposal of the extreme measures typical

of securitization to contrast the two camps' responses to the threat. Trump made sure to highlight that he was ready to take significant action against the threat, whereas he claimed the "elite" were doing the opposite and even benefitting from the threat. It was also concluded that Trump used the extreme measures justified through securitization to attack the liberal institutions of government in the United States and call for a revamp of the "institutional system" just as would be expected of a populist securitizing actor. Lastly, the analysis concluded that President Trump used "border security" or "immigration security" as an empty signifier to solidify the links in the chain by arguing that all of the other demands could not be fulfilled, unless this one was.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

4.1 Research Conclusions

This thesis set out with the intention of answering how securitization can be used by populists to achieve populist objectives. Following extensive research of the literature surrounding these two concepts, the Securitization Theory laid out in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* and the approach to populism in *On Populist Reason* were adopted as the definitions from which this thesis would construct its conceptual framework. The conceptual framework was then constructed by scrutinizing the characteristics of the discourse to better understand the purposes of each, figuring out where the purposes of each overlap, and suggesting where the purposes of securitization could be used to benefit populists. In essence, the conceptual framework culminated in a hypothesis for the proposed research question.

That hypothesis had multiple parts. The first was that populists can use securitization to help form "the people" by assigning various demands in society as the referent objects and threats of a securitization. This allows for the easier acceptance of the securitization and furthers the feelings that the demands are equivalent. The second was that securitization could be utilized by populists to help create the antagonistic divide between "the people" and the "elite" by contrasting their extreme response to the alleged threat to that of the "elite." Additionally, it asserted that securitization could be used by populists to attack the "institutional system" for constraining their ability to combat a threat. That could justify the use of emergency measures to circumvent or eliminate the liberal institutions. The final proposal was that some form of "security" could be used by populists as the empty signifier that is necessary to crystallize their movement.

The framework was then tested against a practical example of a populist movement that has also securitized an issue. The results of that analysis are detailed at the end of chapter three, but the main conclusion was that the populist leader had indeed utilized securitization as a mechanism for furthering populist objectives just as described in the conceptual framework. This thesis is not concluding that all populists use securitization or that securitization is necessary for the formation of a populist movement. The overall conclusions are that securitization is a tool that can be very useful in the formation and sustainment of populist movements and that these concepts require much more research to fully understand.

Despite the lack of very definitive conclusions, the findings from this thesis are actually quite valuable. In general, it was shown that there is a potentially significant relationship between two very popular concepts that are still not completely understood. Additionally, this thesis offered a conceptual framework to better understand that relationship. On top of that, the thesis provided a practical example to substantiate the efficacy of this framework. This can now be applied to future research projects to provide an even better understanding of these concepts. The conclusions of this thesis can also help understand why leaders who are considered to be populists are also often accused of securitizing issues. It is potentially highlighting a political strategy that has already been used or one that could be used in the future by those looking to form a populist movement. It is obviously politically advantageous to try to address the leading issues within a society during an election, but this thesis suggests that, for those looking to form a populist movement, it may be even more politically advantageous to incorporate those issues into a securitization. While this thesis seems to provide more questions than it answers, that should be considered a success as one of the goals was to provide opportunities for future research, which this does.

4.2 Problems

This thesis was one of only a few to examine a possible link between securitization and populism in this way. As such, there were a few issues that need to be addressed. First of all, due to the lack of prior research, this thesis could not rely heavily on other studies to confirm or rebut the proposed link between the two concepts. That is one of the reasons that this thesis seems to raise more questions than it answers. Another issue has to do with the lack of consensus on the definition of populism. Since there is still debate over the definition of the term, those who disagree with the definition of populism used in this thesis will likely discredit most of the

findings. One potential problem with securitization is that it could be argued that the purposes of securitization depend on the intentions of the securitizing actor. Therefore, one might argue that it may not be possible to definitively determine whether a populist is using securitization for populist purposes. Additionally, the use of discourse analysis in chapter three might lead to accusations of cherry picking speeches in order to portray Trump in a certain way. However, Donald Trump's immigration discourse is one of the areas that has remained pretty consistent from his candidacy through his presidency. One final problem to be considered is that showing that one populist has potentially used securitization in this way is not enough to definitively confirm the relationship between the concepts. While there are quite a few potential issues with this thesis, many of these can be solved with further research.

4.3 Areas for Further Research

Arguably one of the most important contributions of this thesis is the opportunities that it provides for future research. To begin with, the use of this definition of populism is likely to cause some debate. One avenue for research could be to see if there is a different relationship between populism and securitization, or any relationship at all, when a different definition of populism is substituted. Another opportunity for more research stems from the fact that Donald Trump is still in office, and his movement is still intact. With an election looming, it will be interesting to see if Mr. Trump tries to securitize an issue again to strengthen the movement. If so, one could examine whether the framework offered here still applies. The most important area for further research is to determine if this conceptual framework applies to other situations as well. It is critical for truly determining the efficacy of this framework that it is applied to other populist leaders and movements to see if the relationship holds true or needs to be amended. Perhaps, after applying this to other examples of populists who use securitization, it will be found that the relationship proposed is no longer accurate. Even if that is the case, this thesis will still have accomplished one of its main goals by advancing the understanding of these concepts through an elimination of one possible explanation.

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