

## RIGHT WING POPULISM IN US AND INDIA: ANALYSIS OF NARENDRA MODI'S AND DONALD TRUMP'S FOREIGN POLICY

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### **Abstract**

*The rise of the right-wing populism has significantly shaped the domestic and international political landscapes. This has rose an important implication for foreign policy shifts as well. This paper has examined an important relation between the populist leadership and foreign policy. A comparative analysis has been established between US President Donald Trump with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The paper is grounded with the post-structural framework in which it has been explored how populist narratives and identity construction discourse influence the foreign policy orientations in different geographical contexts. This paper has also argued that while both the leaders employ similar right-wing populist rhetoric based on nationalism, anti-elitism, "us versus them" dichotomy, still both the leader's foreign policy trajectories diverge significantly. Trump's America First approach focuses on multilateralism, protectionism, and skepticism towards international institutions. Whereas, Narendra Modi's India First vision shows a strong strategic engagement with international institutions at multiple platforms, combining the assertive nationalism with active global participation for enhancing India's international image. The paper has considered populist leadership as independent variable with its relation with the dependent variable of foreign policy which actually becomes a tool for legitimizing the authority and fore reinforcing the political narratives as well. The findings of the paper has suggested that populism does not necessarily produces a uniform same foreign policy outcomes for two different populist leaders. Rather it manifests and maneuver the foreign policy in a different manner depending on the "choices made by populist leaders" with an inclusion of regional dynamics, and strategic objectives.*

**Keywords:** *populist leadership, foreign policy, post-structuralism*

### **Introduction**

Rise of populism around the world prompts an imperative question regarding the consequences in a country's foreign policy. Not much enquiry has been performed to understand the relationship between the "populism and foreign policy".

"Populism" has appeared to be as a "transformative political phenomenon" in the democracies at global level in the contemporary era. The relationship between populism and foreign policy has changed not only the domestic politics but the international relations as well. This theoretical aspect is linked with the "rights of the people in its purest form" contrary to the deceitful leaders who emphasizes on the viewpoint of nationalism to rally the thoughts of public mainly for extensive sustainability of their regime. Under such governments, foreign policy is deeply exaggerated and moves away from multilateralism, hence, negates the notion of global governance" towards "transactional alliances and unilateral diplomacy. In the present-day world, the right-wing populism is well-thought-out to be an ideology that brings "pure people" against the "corrupt or elite class", and whoever prerogatives the "will" of a common man. Henceforth, the right-wing populism is grounded on the chronicle being built by the elites delivering the concept of "nationalism and protectionism" under their guidance. Such populist leaders often frame their matters under the umbrella of "us versus them" just like "America First or India first". (Mushtaq, Mazari, & Ahsan, 2024)

Populist rational usually gains strength from the underlying factors such as rising public embitterment with the formation of the political parties' failure to meet people's expectations

especially in terms of economic adversities and due to the uneven impact of “elitist” globalization. This paper will focus on the fact that notwithstanding the countries’ different political and economic systems, both the leaders chased the “nationalist-driven” foreign policies. The boom of populism is often seen by the researchers as a threat to the “liberal democracy and liberal international order”. By examining a nexus between populism and foreign policy, this paper will analyze its multifaceted relationship with foreign policy, and nationalism. The paper will examine the main factor of populism in which populist actors use foreign policy to decree themselves as the representative of the people. So far, the relation between the populist government with the foreign policy has not been thoroughly studied, predominantly with the case studies of Donald Trump and Narendra Modi. Though, the study and literature review on the populism at international level is being growing rapidly, but theory based, procedural study, and evidence-based analysis of an impact on foreign policy is still scarce. This research paper not only has made an analysis for an impression of populist leadership on foreign policy but also has shaped an attempt to draw a comparative analysis through the lens of theoretical lens of post-structuralism converging on the narratives, discourse, and policies like protectionism that has shaped the stratagem consequences of respective countries. (Rosch & Wojczewski, 2024)

Donald Trump’s foreign policy mainly from 2017-2021 can be characterized as an “unapologetic notion based on America’s First” policy marked with the essential departure of the image of decades of “US-led international cooperation or global institutionalism” worldwide. For example, by technically withdrawing from significant international pacts of Paris Climate Agreement, Iran Nuclear Deal and the Trans-Pacific-Partnership (TTP) by declaring them as “unnecessary and exploitative” deals which is not giving any advantage to the Americans. NATO has also been grilled by the Trump and he has suspected his allies by owning them as “free-riding” and that they are exploiting American’s resources i.e., US has contributed in defense 3.7% as compared to 1.4% by Germany and similar percentage by other allies. Trump’s foreign policy rhetoric has been aligned perfectly with the populism by representing the international organizations, allies, the elite class, and the establishment as parasites of the American society. On the other hand, Narendra Modi’s foreign policy since 2014 has been a combination of “dynamic nationalism with active multilateral arrangements”. Modi has shaped an image of India as a global participator in revolutionizing projects and when it comes to global governance such as the country’s dynamic role in QUAD, its leadership role in International Solar Alliance, and its victory to secure a permanent seat in the United Nations’ Security Council. Modi’s main leadership role has emphasized on “Self-Reliant India” for plummeting dependency on the foreign countries to meet its economic needs which imitates the narrative of right-wing populism.

While both Trump and Modi function from dissimilar geopolitical regions, but US as a global power and India as a regional rising country shows a remarkable similarity when it comes to following the “right-wing ideology of Populism”. Both the leaders have considered the international relations as “zero-sum competition”, emphasizing on nationalism. However, their application exhibits a different paradigm, i.e., Trump’s right-wing populism is based on retreating from global institutions, whereas, Modi’s populism is captivated on profound contribution at global level to bring the focus of foreign countries in India’s favor.

***“It is noteworthy that although policies of Trump propped towards isolationism, and retreating from multilateral pacts, Modi on the other hand adopted strategic multilateralism, balancing out nationalism with global collaboration. Hence, the paper uses an independent variable “populist leadership” as the foremost catalyst behind their similar foreign policy outcomes”***, regardless of the significant differences in their political and economic structures.

The rationale of this paper for seeing different populist leadership with different geographical paradigm is to create a unique comparative analysis of two contemporaneous leaders who have successfully able to bind right-wing populism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's globalization and information revolutionary era. The US as a global hegemon and India as a growing regional power presents a contrasting case studies on how populism can operate in different regions of the world with mutual ideological purpose but with different foreign policies. Hence, understanding such unique dynamics is necessary in global diplomacy to advantage the traction which can redesign the international relations.

The findings of this paper has been based on **“how right-wing populism, irrespective of regional frameworks, constructs a successful antagonism between the “elites” and “the people” for enacting themselves as the rightful representatives through redefining foreign policy that prioritizes their nationalist, and authoritarian rhetoric”.**

### **Theoretical model**

As (Tirado & Babbili, 2022) has explained in his article that the modern concept of Populism arose at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to comprehend the various political movements' influence on the societies with masses belong to the underprivileged and deprived class whose main demands is to have better necessities of life from their governments. Initially, populist leaders originated within these civilizations and societies were either belonged from agricultural background or factory workers. In the 1930's, the classic concept of populism arises within the groups of deprived ones to gain their own representation due to the deteriorating living conditions and inequality. For Hermet 2003, this type of populism originates among the varied group of people belonged from varied economic and social sectors, who engages with the opportunistic yet adroit leaders. Their political aspirations are being legitimized by the slogans about “the people” specially to pursue economic recompences for those who are in need.

Lodhi, 2022 stated in her article, that thoughts which are prevailing on the peripheral of society are mainstreamed by the populist leaders. For example, Trump's policy to instill white supremacy by integrating them in his politics. According to the author, the departure of the populist leaders means the ouster of their ideas as well from the country. Populist thinking gains strength from the rising factors in the society when the people's prospects are not met by the traditional political parties particularly in times for economic downfall and uneven “elitist” impact of globalization, including insecurities emerged from anti-immigrant, anti-minority sentiments. Such opinions are usually fed-off by the populist leaders from which they take leverage especially during election campaigns, as they exploit the political institutions which are incapable to meet the people's needs, which Trump did especially his narrative about anti-immigrant policy. Populist leaders portrays such groups as threat to the society which aggravates public animosity towards minority and ultimately leads towards violence in the society as it happened with the Muslims living in India as well. One of the most damaging aspect of the populist leaders is that they create deep divisions in their own country which diminished public's trust in the institutions, but in case of India, Modi is trying to adopt a platform in which India can be recognized at almost every International institution which would represent Hindu culture and religion at global level as associated to the Trump's narrative of orchestrating contempt for the international institutions.

Hence, in 1960's, the concept of “economic populism” impelled with an increased protection programs within health, economic and housing sectors. The focus was laid on protecting their own internal markets through nuisance of high taxes on imports through an increased size of government, along with preserving high wages with the use of surplus through exporting their own goods especially in energy sector. At this period in time.00, governments created many public enterprises, which focused on providing high paid jobs, but this process could not able

to operate proficiently which ultimately created massive market crash at both domestic and international level. Later, in 1990's, neo-populism instigated through populist leaders with the blue-collar areas, or from industrial elite background such as the union leaders who focused on cutting the size of government and leaving the markets to control themselves to reduce inequality. This led to the corruption of such leaders due to "free-loading parasites or manipulative actors profiting from inefficient institutions". Neo-populist leaders focused on the usage of effective marketing skills to promote their interests in those societies which are "left behind/deprived" and they asserted to be on their side ensuring that the "state works for them only". From 21<sup>st</sup> century onwards, populism started to be considered as an opposing force originated from the pitfalls of neo-liberal democratic governments due to its detrimental socio-economic policies. Due to this reason, the concept of populism started to be known as the "total rejection of the outmoded political parties which divided the societies between the corrupt elites and the honest or hardworking class".

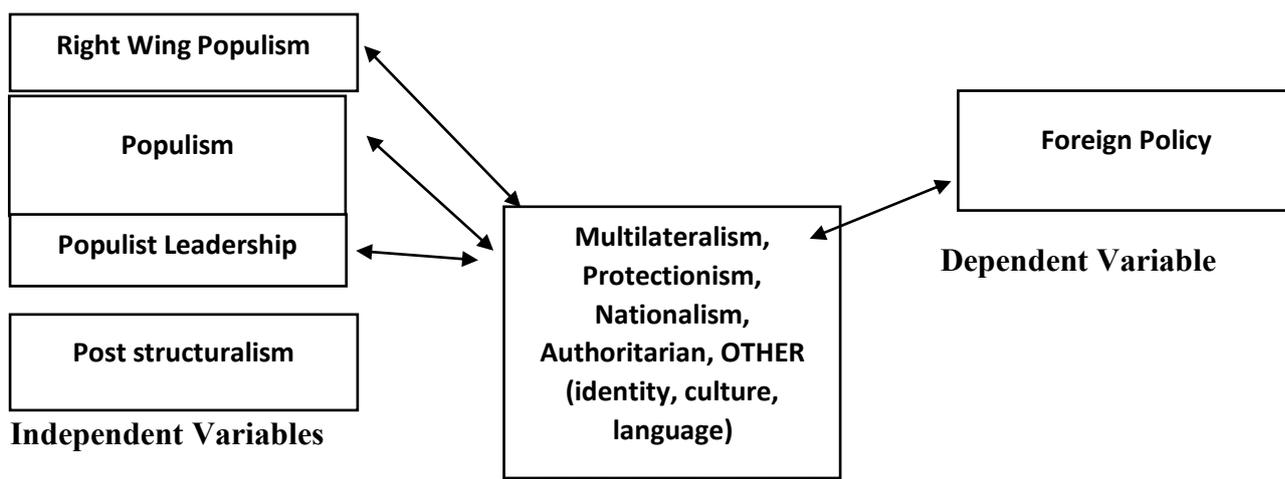
According to Mudde (2004), populism signified the political promise for attaining an ideal world where there is equality and justice; a narrative filled with nationalistic symbols, to restore national identity and to attract enormous support from the deprived societies through sowing discontentment in the observances of the people, and by blaming the governments for the vilest social and economic environment which ultimately creates distrust for democratic institutions. They present themselves as the sole savior of the nation, by dividing and polarizing the nation through constant personal bouts and scandals built around the adversary political parties.

This paper has adopted a theoretical approach of "right-wing populism"; a concept created by Samela and Von Scheve in 2018 as an ideology grounded on the impact of unscrupulous and nefarious economic and political elites, who are willing to sacrifice for their nation but in exchange of their personal returns. This popular symbolization creates resentment against those who relishes lavish lifestyles, and blames the heterogenous groups of "others" (immigrants, refugees, highly paid public servants, unemployed groups) for the nation's calamities. They present an idea for a homogenous society, encompassed of hard-working people, who experienced the negligence and abandonment from the previous government. Such leaders instill fear and creates uncertainty among the people who already feels unsafe and hopeless with the traditional government, and channels despair among them to reach towards the goal of attaining political power. They use the concept developed by a Nazi Jurist "Carl Shmitt" of "absolute enemy", which is a group, class and race of such people who are known to be the "culprits" of every kind of evil present in the society. "Fear" is known to be most striking and authoritative human emotion which populist leaders uses for unifying "society" and controlling their fury to achieve power ending the status quo, corruption and abuses, but this leads to the formation of highly polarized and split social order and creates differences, conflict through creation of scandals, and through their relentless challenging statements.

This paper has analyzed the foreign policies of the two populist leaders Donald Trump and Narendra Modi through a theoretical lens of "post structuralism and populism". It has been noted that while both the leaders depend on on the populist notion and nationalism, their approach of multilateralism diverges when it comes to reinforce the relation with international organizations or other state actors. Trump's foreign policy emphasizes on isolationism or protectionism, whereas Modi has pursued an assertive strategy of multilateralism in order to integrate India at global institutions through promoting Indian Culture and Hinduism. This paper will analyze how their populist leadership approach modifies and upshots the foreign policies. ***"Post structuralism argues that the foreign policy is shaped by the narratives, and representatives of the "Other" which refers to the identities (whether cultural, political or national) in disagreement to something which is different to it. This idea associates with a***

*discourse investigation which means that the meaning is not fixed to something but rather is created through narratives, rhetoric speeches, power structures or language etc.*” For example, the West has demarcated itself as “civilized” mainly by portraying the Non-Western societies as “Uncivilized”. The “Other” is often termed as a “threat” to justify the various policies of nationalism. For example, Trump’s description regarding China’ trading policies, immigration bans or withdrawal from Paris Peace Accord etc., with his discourse of “America First” portrayed allies as an exploitative actor and retreated from multilateralism. Trump’s rhetoric also probed his traditional alliances and US’s legitimacy with the institutions like NATO, UN, and WTO. While on the other hand, Modi has represented Pakistan as their major threat, and target Muslim minorities in India to reinforce Hindutva, or Hindu nationalist narrative. But, Modi’s discourse regarding India’s integration and portraying India as the great power at global level can be illustrated through his constant participation in BRICS, SCO, G20, Modi’s emphasis on “economic diplomacy” through his slogan of “make in India” has increased the economic engagements and India’s role in UN reflected its desire to reshape the global governance structure with an inclusion of Hindu stimulus rather abandoning it.

**Pictorial Depiction of Theoretical model**



**Historical setting of foreign policy in US and India**

According to Wojczewski, 2020, populism is a “thin ideology” which considers a society being separated into “the pure class of people”/ “the immoral elite class” and the people who says that politics depicts the general will of the people. Henceforth, the theory of populism is combined with the concepts of “nationalism” and the policies which the populist leaders make for their state is also associated with the decision-making process of foreign policy. Due to this reason, the notion of “populism” cannot be studied alone without the co-related variables. Ernesto Laclau has better described Modi’s government and his dimensions of using populism and nationalism in his foreign policies to assert himself as the “true illustration” of the people and to “reimagine” India as a “Hindu Nation”. *“Laclau’s Post structuralism states that the identity of states is “constructed” against the differences of the other which means that states are always in the course of “becoming” as they have no ontological status, and the diverse practices creates their true reality”*. By demarcating “an inside from the outside, domestic from foreign, foreign policy is a crucial rhetorical practice through which this difference can

be explained effectively. According to the researcher, foreign policies indeed rely upon the depiction of identity, but the author is of the view that identities are also created through foreign policy, and post-structuralism defines foreign policy as a dimension that creates boundaries both for the state and for an international system. (Lacatus, 2020)

Both Donald Trump and Narendra Modi demonstrate a leadership style based on right-wing populism, though one exercising at the global level, other at regional level respectively. However, reviewing these two styles will demonstrates how foreign policy rhetoric is being influenced through a populist practice regardless of which region a leader belongs to. Prior to 2017, foreign policy has been studied under the lens of liberal school of thought, for example under Obama administration, the world saw the alliances with NATO and other Asia-Pacific partners, Trans-Pacific Partnership, Iran-Nuclear Deal and Paris Climate Accord. However, from 2017-2020, there has been a sharp drift from this ideology towards obligation of tariffs on allies, openly professed scornful rhetoric on US's partners, in short, US took a shift from collective integration to an "America First" policy under transactional relations (Mushtaq, Mazari, & Ahsan, 2024).

Similarly, India also tailed a populist regime under Narendra Modi. Before 2014, Congress led governments have been emphasizing on the strategic autonomy rule for making India "secular". India also maintained its bilateral or multilateral relations with US, USSR or Russia, China and depicted its image as "welcoming" to the world stage. However, after 2014-till date, under Modi's regime, these policies have been transformed into a "Hindu-Nationalized state". Though foreign policy of India still depends on on multilateral diplomacy but its internal politics is following a "nationalism based on Hindutva" under the slogan of "Vishwaguru (world leader)". This slogan was declared openly in G20 summit which highlighted the Hindutva legacy of India based on cultural/soft power instruments. Modi's foreign policy is also following a "self-reliant India or Armanirbhar Bharat" at global level along with following a multilateral rendezvous as well. Hence, both the countries have seen a drastic shift towards populism, or an identity driven rhetoric based on nationalism (Mushtaq, Mazari, & Ahsan, 2024).

**Comparative Analysis of Trump Versus Modi's foreign policy:**

	Characteristics	Donald Trump (US)	Narendra Modi (India)
1	Multilateralism	Rejects multilateral frameworks, withdraws from international agreements	Actively engages in global institutions and trade agreements
2	Narratives on Globalization	Frames globalization as a threat to American workers and sovereignty	Considers globalization as an opportunity for India's rise
3	Foreign Alliances	Tensed relations with NATO, UN, WTO; preference for bilateral deals	Strengthened ties with QUAD, BRICS, G20, and UN
4	Trade Policies	Protectionist; imposed tariffs on both allies and adversaries	Seeks regional integration (e.g., Indo-Pacific strategy)
5	"Nationalism" in Foreign Policy	"America First" rhetoric of global cooperation	"Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) with global determinations

*Post-Structuralism helps in understanding that how populist leaders construct their narratives and legitimizes their foreign policies in different scopes. This theory does not support a fixed pattern that all the populist leaders of the world follows the discourse of "isolationism or*

*protectionism”, rather it depends on other aspects of leadership choices which shapes their international relations eventually.*

Estrada, 2023 explained in his article that at the individual level, while Trump rejected the multilateralism approach, the nationalist and populist leadership on the other hand of Narendra Modi detected this an opportunity to benefit from. Trump’s vision of nationalist and popular slogan of “America First” swayed away the traditional US foreign policy custom of building close allies or to promote liberal international order. Whereas, Modi sensed this as an opportunity to make India a “leading power” and changed “multilateralism”. Furthermore, overlapping tenures of Modi and Trump created a dynamic amalgam of “US withdrawal and India’s forward heave” towards greater global responsibilities. This divergent approach of multilateralism of Trump and Modi poses questions for the relationship of populism and foreign policy. Researchers have considered both the leaders as “anti-elitisms” in their domestic political addresses, as Loffmann has argued in his research that Trump has manifested rejection of elites, as a perpetuator to support an activist US stance for becoming a global power, whereas Mearsheimer claimed that Trump has outlined an international engagement as a threat to self-government, national security and economic interests. (Yousaf, Lal, & Alvi, 2024)

Friedrichs has explained the comparative analysis of populist leaders of Modi and Trump through their speeches. Conferring to him, “Trump’s discourse of populist foreign policy exhibits his hostility towards other states and international organizations which is the reason why US cut its funding to the United Nations, marginalizing and relegating of the International Criminal Court, and withdrawal from Paris Peace Accords. The style of Trump’s populism accentuates on the national sovereignty over the “shared international values for global institutions”, when he said in his 2019 speech in the UN General Assembly, that the future belongs to patriots, not to globalists, and to those who protects their citizens”. Whereas, on the other hand, in contrast of Trump’s strategy of impartiality from multilateralism, the researcher has argued, that Modi has declared India as the prime provider of international goods to strengthened its alliances for example through a step like constructing the international Solar Alliance in India. At the domestic level of study, Modi’s foreign policy resonates firstly with his endeavors to make India great at the global level through the use of media. Secondly, Modi has leveraged his ambition to spread Hindu nationalism at global level through initiatives like International Day of Yoga (an efficacious resolution accepted in 2014) which was showcasing of his domestic support to disperse Indian culture at the global level. (Muno & Pfeiffer, 2022) Poletti and Zambenardi reasoned, that the Trump’s trade policy was the most visible part of his protectionist economic stance for America First. Hence, at the systemic level, Trump’s administration superintended a deterioration in the US-China relations. Whereas, on the other hand, in mid-2020, border stalemate took place between India and China in the Galwan Valley which exaggerated the pre-existing Indian concerns about Chinese powerful actions for territorial entitlements. India answered this assertion through its steadily rising influence in international organizations against the competition of China. Such as, India’s candidacy for elections to the International court of justice in 2017 which made Dalveer Bhandari as one of the seven judges to be elected with the withdrawal of UK’s competitor, leaving the British Judge from ICJ for the first time in the history. This victory showed the rising of India as great power against the colonial power. India was also elected for 2021-2022 tenure of UN Security Council in June 2020 which shows Modi’s agenda to prioritize India at geopolitical cooperation to strengthen multilateralism. This explains the “double-down” policy of Modi to increase its influence in the world of “multilateralism” against China as compared to the Trump’s

“traditional great power” politics by daunting economic sanctions. (Chennattuserry, Deshpande, & Hong, 2024)

Both the Trump and Modi has subsequently followed strong populist rhetoric based on nationalism and both the leaders focuses on the narrative of “America/India First” by not relying much on the allies. Trump has changed the economic policy after cutting the budgets for international institutions like UN agencies and have questioned the role of NATO, whereas Modi has favored the policy of multilateralism with a policy of non-interference. Both the leaders have blended the theory of populism with a focus on protecting sovereignty and nationalism specifically a cultural aspect as Modi promotes Hinduism while Trump has attracted Americans for accepting Judeo-Christian legacy. Significantly, both the leaders have linked foreign policy with the domestic values to satisfy the people’s will.

When it comes to the differences, both the leaders contrast in various ways such as Modi’s approach is to follow an aspect of “regional integration” for example QUAD security dialogue, or other bilateral or multilateral defense pacts. On the other hand, Trump follows a strategy of “America First in terms of an ideology of Isolationism/transactional”, for example US’s demand from Ukraine to make peace deal in order to get more aid, or removal from international pacts such as Paris Climate Accord, or other defense related pacts or imposing high tariffs to its own allies (Rosch & Wojczewski, 2024).

#### **Crucial themes of populism in Modi and Trump’s FP**

##### **Nationalism and America First and India First approaches**

Donald Trump and Narendra Modi has repeatedly promised to make their countries great. Their slogans based on Nationalism in order to purify their respective countries from the corrupt elites and by reviving a cultural aspect in their foreign policy. According to the research both the leaders have appealed as the best representors for their public, as the rightful barrier of protecting their nations from elites based either in their own country or abroad.

##### **Bilateralism over multi literalism**

Trump has rejected to continue his multilateral agreements with Mexico and Canada and has announced about 25% tariffs on both the countries apart from issuing worldwide tariff of 10% on all the countries. He has also withdrawn US from major global institutional pacts of WHO, UNESCO etc., and from treaties of Paris Climate Accord, Iran nuclear deal etc. This has dismantled US from an entire global integration system. In contrast to this, Modi has openly welcomed bilateral or multilateral arenas for India while focusing on an aspect of its Hindutva and prioritizing Indian civilization foreign policy. He has deepened his strategic ties robust specially in Indo Pacific and his defense agreements with countries of France, Russia and US. India has also participated in G20 summit showing Modi’s plurilateral side, while concentrating on the International Solar Alliance and bestowing the greater India image on global platforms like United Nations. India’s active role in ASEAN for Asian groupings like in BIMSTEC or QUAD has shown that its foreign policy is not grounded on isolationism rather focuses more in joint global pacts. (Verma & Gu, 2025)

##### **Trade and economic protectionism**

The right-wing economic nationalism also shows a contrast as Trump has declared a national emergency situation in his foreign policy while accusing the foreign trading companies for making the American industries hollow. Hence, Trump’s focus is on increasing the supply chain mechanism of American made products and hence imposed 10% tariffs on the imported goods. This protectionism policy cascades under the populist economic ideology for restoring the national goods and ensuring the country’s economic security while discouraging the other’s countries products. Similarly, Modi has followed the same strategy of protectionism for

enhancing the domestic industries as a result of which India's exports has been increased from 1,940 crore Indian rupees in 2014-2015 to 23,622 crore Indian rupees in 2024-2025.

### **Hegemonic Military and Defense policies**

When it comes to building military industries stronger, both the leaders plan to "rebuild their military and arms stronger". US follows an "anti-Chinese" strategy and has declared China as dangerous adversary and in order to confront it, the country has bolstered its defense budget. Modi on the other hand is also facing a regional threat both from China and Pakistan. Hence, India has also focused on increasing its defense budget and military developments. In 2022, India has launched its new aircraft of INS Vikrant with protracted range of BrahMos missiles as well. Such achievements apart from notable space-related expeditions and increased defense exports has led India towards new milestones in gaining a pivotal position to face any kind of aggression from its neighboring countries. (Riaz & Jhandad, 2025)

### **Border and immigrant security issues**

Trump's populist discourse for migrants has followed a strict campaign against Mexico and has levied travel bans on various Muslim countries as well. US has sharply reduced the refugee's settlers and has outlined the immigrants as "job-stealers and criminals" for the country. Similarly, Modi has declared outsiders as threat to the country; for example, he has characterized Bangladeshi as illegal immigrants and Rohingya Muslims as menacing the security of country while blaming Pakistan to host the terrorists in India and for creating radicalization as well. India has also boycotted Maldivians when they mentioned against Indian political figures over media and has amplified them as treacherous to their national interests. Populism has been commonly understood as a "thin-centered" or "thin" ideology which has very limited set of ideas about how the society should look like. It is hard to explain who exactly constitutes the people and where the "elites" are most likely are centered by a "thick" comprehensive ideology as seen in Modi's regime. This "thick ideology" has been promoted by BJP party in India and its family related organizations among which RSS is most familiar.

### **Role of Social Media**

Trump has revolutionized the way to communicate with his people especially through Twitter as a direct channel for delivering messages to nation especially his foreign policy decisions. Similarly, Modi has also used social media aggressively for endorsing his messages to the public. Hence, social media has played a vivacious role for both the leaders to mobilize their support channels and messages in order to gain public support by bypassing all kinds of other traditional methods of communicating such as newspapers, expert briefings etc., in delivering leader's message to the nation (Lacatus, 2020).

### **Geopolitical Dimension and Foreign Policy making**

Narendra Modi has followed a regional incorporation strategy under the framework of "Act East" for its neighboring countries. It has revived its relations with Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh while keeping strong ties with Russia particularly in gaining military equipment. India has balanced its position against China through international bilateral agreement like QUAD security dialogue, LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement), etc. which has strengthened its relations with US. In short, Modi has depicted an image of India as a rising power in Southeast Asia. The analysts in Gateway House noted that in 2025, India's policy will be relied on "managing relations with US, China, Russia, and other countries in its neighbors", hence ratifying its strategic autonomy through soft power rather using hard power narrative. Whereas, Trump's vision is hypothetical and aggressive in its nature as it is based on highly centralization with the motto of America First at its core. For example, his statements that "every penny" of foreign aid to Ukraine will be monitored and his vision about the allies as non-profitable depicts his transactional leadership style. Apart from this by following a rule

of reciprocity with its allies through obligation of tariffs with its allies shows that US is following an isolationism framework at global level. Over time, de facto border has become a “theater” of direct confrontations between India and China, with the expansion of military at its core. Furthermore, faced with repeated Chinese skirmishes and incursions at border of Ladakh, Modi’s approach has been less conciliatory as compared to the predecessor. There has also been an evidence that India has quietly tolerated such repercussions from China despite the ongoing tensions. Hence, despite such escalatory military tensions, Modi’s government has chosen more indirect ways of countering China through deepening its ties with the West especially United States, and Taiwan e.g., through QUAD strategical dialogue. This highlights India’s aim at constraining China’s influence in Multilateral and bilateral forums. (Destradi, 2026)

### Conclusion

The foreign policy of both Trump and Modi revolves around “populist discourse” in the light of post-structural analysis, that they have used the narrative, language, in such a manner for building a nationalism-based rhetoric for defining their aggressors. Trump’s Americanism and Modi’s Hinduism has formed such speeches and policies that they have clearly signified “us” verses “them” at global level. Though both the leaders contrast when it comes to preserving bilateral and multilateral relations for economic, cultural and regional integration. Under this theoretical aspect, it can be suggested that “populist foreign policy” is a fixed concept rather an ongoing concept that can be altered with the passage of time. Its implication is inherently based and is contingent to some degree which populist leaders have sustained amongst themselves throughout the period. Henceforth, understanding foreign policy through the lens of narrative building construct which post structuralism posits can significantly be implied to elucidate the behavior of a populist leadership style. For example, in this paper, it has been clarified with an in-depth study that how threats can be framed, and how allies are being portrayed by these leaders which is important for making the foreign policy rhetoric and narratives. In short, post structuralism prompts that underneath the real-world affairs, there lies a nuanced expansive dimension that underpins a narrative which can remarkably steer the wheel country in global stage. Even in the absence of any “coherent right-wing populist framework”, this approach of ruling has cumulative effects on world politics and foreign policies of the countries which is very significant. The case of US and India’s governments, with rising transnationalism and heightened unpredictability illustrates the strong relation of populism with foreign policy. The findings of the paper have shown that these dynamics do not necessarily amount to the shared policy agenda under two different populism regimes which has ultimately led to the long-term implications for future research on populism and international foreign policy trajectory.

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