

# Do Campaign Speeches Predict Foreign Policy? An Operational Code and Leadership Trait Analysis of Donald Trump's MENA Policies

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# Do Campaign Speeches Predict Foreign Policy? An Operational Code and Leadership Trait Analysis of Donald Trump's MENA Policies

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## ABSTRACT

This article investigates whether campaign speeches during the US presidential elections can help predict foreign policy behavior. We use speeches made by Donald J. Trump during his bid for president in 2016. We compare the analysis from 2016 with his actual foreign policy decisions during his tenure, 2017-2020. Operational code analysis and leadership traits analysis approaches are used to analyze candidate Trump's foreign policy beliefs and strategies associated with them. We use Profiler Plus software to conduct content analysis which produces OCA and LTA results. We use three separate datasets to analyze Trump's beliefs and traits focusing on his general foreign policy speeches, the MENA region, and a third one only about Islamic State and Syria. Our results show that Trump's profile indicates a foreign policy orientation that avoids involvement in affairs that are perceived as beyond immediate interests. The consistency between his beliefs and traits during the 2016 campaign and his actual foreign policy behavior leads us to conclude that individual level analysis, and specifically OCA and LTA approaches, are useful tools to analyze, explain and predict foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Political Beliefs, Leadership Typologies, Contextualized Sampling, Campaign Speeches, Foreign Policy Analysis

## Introduction

Donald Trump's election as the 45<sup>th</sup> United States (US) President took many observers by surprise. Many foreign policy decisions during his presidency also surprised academics and followers of US foreign policy. Amongst others, the decision to move the US Embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and to withdraw militarily from Syria can be considered such examples. Many scholars of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) find these foreign policy decisions surprising and to be major deviations from long-standing, institutionally driven official US foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> Academic literature also predicted that Trump's foreign policy behavior will be rather unpredictable due to the extreme indices detected in his speeches.<sup>2</sup> It follows from this unpredictability that certain of Trump's foreign policy decisions were deemed surprising among foreign policy circles both in academia and policy making.

This paper questions the 'surprising' nature of Donald Trump's foreign policy decisions. We investigate the foreign policy orientations of Donald Trump by analyzing his election campaign speeches focusing on foreign policy through the methods of Operational Code Analysis (OCA)<sup>3</sup> and Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA).<sup>4</sup> We argue that Trump's foreign policy was predictable, using FPA tools available to us, before he came to power. Our findings suggest that Trump administration's decision to withdraw from Syria, which was then found "unexpected"<sup>5</sup> is not surprising as his OCA and LTA scores reveal a foreign policy orientation which refrains from becoming involved in issues that are not related to immediate US interests. Built upon these findings, the study argues that Donald Trump has quite a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. Findings of the analysis demonstrate that Trump's foreign policy orientation causes him to avoid direct US involvement in issues that does not affect the United States directly. Rather, the findings reveal a presidential profile favoring policies that would bring 'returns' in a shorter term and can be narrated as a success story to the US domestic audience. The paper underlines that the foreign policy orientation confirmed by our findings in 2016 was also influential in the decision to withdraw from Syria militarily in 2018-2019. The study also shows that the individual level of analysis in general and at-a-distance leadership assessment tools available in the field of FPA are useful analytical tools to grasp the nature of foreign

- 1 Benjamin S. Day and Alister Wedderburn, "Wrestlemania! Summit Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Performance after Trump", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No 2, 2022, p. 1-13.
- 2 Oliver Turner and Juliet Kaarbo, "Predictably Unpredictable: Trump's Personality and Approach Towards China", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 34, No 3, 2021, p. 452-471.
- 3 Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1951; Nathan Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, New York, Free Press, 1953.
- 4 Margaret G. Hermann, "Circumstances under Which Leader Personality Will Affect Foreign Policy: Some Propositions", J. Rosenau (ed.), *In Search of Global Patterns*, New York, Free Press, 1976, p. 326-332; Margaret G. Hermann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders", *International Studies Quarterly*, No 24, 1980, p. 7-46; Margaret G. Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis", *Social Science Automation System*, 1999; Margaret G. Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis", Jerrold M. Post (ed.), *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 2005, p. 178-212.
- 5 Megan Specia, "The Planned U.S. Troop Withdrawal From Syria: Here's the Latest", *New York Times*, 16 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/16/world/middleeast/syria-us-troops-timeline.html> (Accessed 03 March 2019 and 20 June 2022).

policy decision making. By using contextualized speech samples, the study brings a novel perspective to the use of these research tools.

Next section discusses OCA and LTA with references to the literature and the procedures that were followed. Then, we present our results by explaining what the findings in each parameter mean in terms of foreign policy orientation. A discussion on the results and their implications on foreign policy decisions of Trump administration follows in the third part. Finally, concluding section discusses the findings and the suitability of the OCA and LTA for forecasting foreign policy decisions.

## Operational Code Analysis

Various leader-based approaches to foreign policy focus on exploring the impact of individual leaders on the foreign policy decision outcome.<sup>6</sup> Leaders play significant roles in making foreign policy decisions.<sup>7</sup> This renders leaders important agents to analyze to grasp the components of the foreign policy making process. Understanding political beliefs and leadership styles of leaders sheds light on how they handle foreign policy issues and what kind of behavioral patterns they adopt in their foreign policy actions. Text-based analyses come to the foreground over the last couple of decades as popular tools of analyzing leaders. OCA and LTA are two such methods that focus on leaders via text-based analysis. The general practice in the literature is to use these two at-a-distance leadership assessment tools separately. In this study, we utilize both tools. This provides a twofold contribution to our analysis. First, it helps us to compare the results acquired via a two leader-focused approach. This increases the validity of the findings that are crosschecked within the framework of two analytical tools. Secondly, certain indices of two methods can be considered as complementary to each other. For instance, while OCA explores philosophical and instrumental beliefs of the leader, LTA also provides insight for leaders' task-orientation skills. This helps us take a snapshot of the leader with a broader profile. Next pages introduce these two approaches<sup>8</sup>, methodology and explains the procedures of our analysis.

OCA focuses on a leader's political beliefs, which shape the leader's perception of the political universe and 'Other' actors in it.<sup>9</sup> This approach was developed by Leites in

6 James Rosenau, *National Leadership and Foreign Policy: A Case Study in the Mobilization of Public Support*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2015; Fulya Ereker, "Dış Politikayı Analiz Etmek: Dış Politika Analizinde Yapan-Yapı Sorunu", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 9, No 36, 2013, p. 50.

7 Özgür Özdamar, "Oyun Kuramının Uluslararası İlişkiler Yazınına Katkıları", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 4, No 15, 2007, p. 35; Mustafa Aydın and Sinem Açıkmeşe, "Uluslararası İlişkiler Kuramlarında Ana Akımlara Yeniden Bakış", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 12, No 46, 2015, p. 1-9.

8 Due to word limitations, this section does not critically engage the OCA and LTA literature. Instead, we only present a brief review of important concepts, variables and measurements that are utilized in this paper. For a critical review of the literature, please see Mark Schafer and Steven Walker, *Operational Code Analysis and Foreign Policy Roles: Crossing Simon's Bridge*, London, Routledge, 2021.

9 Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1951; Nathan Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, New York, Free Press, 1953; Alexander L. George, "The Operational Code: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision Making", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No 2, 1969, p. 190-222; Alexander L. George, "The Causal Nexus Between Beliefs and Behavior", Lawrence S. Falkowski (ed.), *Psychological Models in International Politics*, Boulder, Westview, 1979, p. 95-124; Stephen G. Walker, "The Motivational Foundations

the early 1950s to analyze decision-making processes in the Soviet Politburo and to forecast specific foreign policy decisions that were likely to be made by this political group.<sup>10</sup> Its theory and method were developed further by Alexander George<sup>11</sup> and Stephen Walker.<sup>12</sup> OCA is built upon two main assumptions: (1) A leader's world of meanings, perceptions, political beliefs and ideological background are influential in his or her foreign policy decision-making process. (2) A leader's speeches (essentially public speeches) are good indicators of his or her political beliefs and perceptions of the political universe.<sup>13</sup> We also argue that these beliefs work as causal mechanisms and useful tools to explain and predict actual foreign policy behavior.<sup>14</sup>

OCA produces two sets of indices about a leader's cognitive world. The first set is composed of five parameters that represent the leader's philosophical beliefs. The second set is also composed of five indices representing the leader's instrumental propensities. While philosophical beliefs demonstrate how a leader perceives the political universe and the Others in that universe, instrumental beliefs represent how a leader constructs the self and engages with these Others. These philosophical and instrumental beliefs are analyzed through ten questions formulated by George<sup>15</sup> and later refined by other operational code scholars.

Since then, OCA has been a popular tool for analyzing leaders and their foreign policy-making algorithms from a distance. The method has been used to analyze foreign policy making in a comparative manner for actors such as Turkey and Israel<sup>16</sup> or employed for

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of Political Belief Systems: A Reanalysis of the Operational Code Construct", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No 2, 1983, p.179-201; Stephen G. Walker, "The Evolution of Operational Code Analysis", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 11, No 2, 1990, p. 403-418; Stephen G. Walker and M. Schafer, "Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as cultural icons of US foreign policy", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 28, No 6, 2007, p. 747-776.

10 Operational code analysis was used to analyze Middle Eastern leaders as well. See Özgür Özdamar and Sercan Canbolat, "Understanding New Middle Eastern Leadership: An Operational Code Approach", *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No 1, 2018, p. 19-31; Özgür Özdamar, "Leadership Analysis at a "Great Distance": Using the Operational Code Construct to Analyze Islamist Leaders", *Global Society*, Vol. 31, No 2, 2017, p. 167-198.

11 George, "The Operational Code".

12 Walker, "The Motivational Foundations of Political Belief Systems".

13 Kalevi J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No 3, 1970, p. 233-309; Margaret G Hermann, "Explaining foreign policy behavior using the personal characteristics of political leaders", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1980, p. 7-46; Stephen G. Walker, Mark Schafer, and Michael D. Young, "Presidential Operational Codes and Foreign Policy Conflicts in the Post-cold War World", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 43, No 5, 1999, p. 610-625; Knud Erik Jorgensen, "Theorising the European Union's Foreign Policy", Ben Tonra and Thomas Christiansen (eds.), *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2018, p. 24; Cameron Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy", ISA Compendium Project: Foreign Policy Analysis Section, Available at: [http://www.isanet.org/compendium\\_sections/2007/06/foreign\\_policy\\_.html](http://www.isanet.org/compendium_sections/2007/06/foreign_policy_.html); Valerie Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, New York, Toronto, Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

14 Özgür Özdamar and Erdem Ceydilek, "European Populist Radical Right Leaders' Foreign Policy Beliefs: An Operational Code Analysis", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 26, No 1, 2020, p. 137-162; Stephen Walker and Mark Schafer, *Beliefs and Leadership in World Politics Methods and Applications of Operational Code Analysis*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

15 George, "The Operational Code", p. 200-216.

16 Barış Kesgin, *Political Leadership and Foreign Policy in Post-cold War Israel and Turkey.*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Kansas, 2011.

leaders of a particular region such as Middle Eastern leaders.<sup>17</sup> Recently, the OCA's software-based database was translated into other languages to analyze leaders' speeches in their native languages, particularly in Arabic<sup>18</sup> and Turkish.<sup>19</sup>

For this study we concern ourselves only with three of the questions, namely the primary parameters of OCA: philosophical questions 1 and 4 (P-1 and P-4) and instrumental question 1 (I-1):

P-1. What is the “essential” nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?

P-4. How much “control” or “mastery” do self and other have over historical development? What is self and other's role in “moving” and “shaping” history in the desired direction?

I-1. What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?

**Table 1.** Select Operational Code Indices. Adapted from Walker, Schafer and Young 199920

	Question	Index	Interpretation
P-1	NATURE OF THE POLITICAL UNIVERSE (Image of Others)	(%Positive) minus (%Negative) Transitive Other Attributions	+1.0 friendly to -1.0 hostile
P-4	CONTROL OVER HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT (Locus of Control)	Self (P4a) or Other (P4b) Attributions / [Self plus Other Attributions]	1.0 high to 0.0 low self control
I-1	APPROACH TO GOALS (Direction	(%Positive) minus (%Negative Self)	+1.0 high cooperation to -1.0 high-conflict

## Leadership Trait Analysis

LTA is another conceptual toolbox used to analyze leadership qualities vis à vis foreign policy. The method is used widely to analyze different leaders' profile with respect to seven LTA indices. Studies in the literature focus on different aspects of the nexus between leadership traits and foreign policy making, such as the relationship between personality traits and role conceptions<sup>21</sup> and changing profiles of the same leaders with respect to the addressed

17 Sercan Canbolat, *Understanding the New Middle Eastern Leaders: An Operational Code Approach*, Unpublished MA thesis, Bilkent University, 2014.

18 Sercan Canbolat, “Deciphering Deadly Minds in Their Native Language: The Operational Codes and Formation Patterns of Militant Organizations in the Middle East and North Africa”, Mark Schafer and Stephen G. Walker (eds.), *Operational Code Analysis and Foreign Policy Roles*, London, Routledge, 2021, p. 69-92.

19 Sercan Canbolat, “Understanding Political Islamists' Foreign Policy Rhetoric in Their Native Language: A Turkish Operational Code Analysis Approach”, *APSA MENA Politics Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No 1, 2020, p. 13-16.

20 Walker, Schafer and Young, “Presidential Operational Codes and Foreign Policy Conflicts in Post-Cold War World”, p. 615.

21 Esra Cuhadar, Juliet Kaarbo, Baris Kesgin, and Binnur Ozkececi-Taner, “Personality or Role? Comparisons of Turkish Leaders across Different Institutional Positions”, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 38, No 1, 2017, p. 39-54.

audience<sup>22</sup>. Like OCA, LTA scholars assume that a leader's perception of others and their sensitivity to incoming information can help analysts understand and forecast the leader's general foreign policy orientation and possible foreign policy decisions. In line with this assumption, Hermann suggests that "one way of learning more about political leaders that does not require their cooperation is by examining what they say."<sup>23</sup> LTA was developed by Hermann to analyze the realization procedures of leaders' political preferences. Different from the OCA approach, interviews can be used in LTA analysis.<sup>24</sup> At this point, using spontaneous material such as flash interviews is more common in the LTA literature.<sup>25</sup> However, the literature also states that most interviews given by leaders are rehearsed, even prewritten by consultants and speechwriters in the leaders' teams.<sup>26</sup> Hermann suggests that an adequate assessment of leadership requires at least 50 interview responses each of which is at least 100 words.<sup>27</sup> Yet Hermann also stated in her earlier works that speeches can also be used as materials to analyze leaders at a distance.<sup>28</sup> As finding that many interview responses with the minimum required length content for presidential candidates is quite difficult, we use the same set of speeches comprised of addresses as well as two interviews (of which content far above the minimum limit) for both OCA and LTA. Hermann suggests asking three major questions to understand a leadership style:

- (a) How do leaders react to political constraints in their environment – do they respect or challenge such constraints?
- (b) How open are leaders to incoming information – do they selectively use information or are they open to information directing their response?
- (c) What are the leaders' reasons for seeking their positions – are they driven by an internal focus of attention within themselves or by the relationships that can be formed with salient constituents?<sup>29</sup>

By answering these questions, it is possible to understand whether a leader is sensitive or insensitive to the political context and to what extent a leader attempts to assume control over what is going on in the political world. LTA presents seven scores on a leader's traits: 1) Belief in one's own Ability to Control events (BACE), 2) Need for power (PWR), 3) Conceptual complexity (CC), 4) Self-confidence (SC), 5) Distrust of others (DIS), 6) In-group bias (IGB) and 7) Task orientation (TASK).

22 Barış Kesgin, "Turkey's Erdoğan: Leadership Style and Foreign Policy Audiences", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 21, No 1, 2020, p. 56-82.

23 Margaret G. Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis", *Social Science Automation System*, 1999, p. 1.

24 *Ibid.*

25 David G. Winter, "Measuring the Motives of Political Actors at a Distance", in Jerrold M. Post (ed.), *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2003, p. 173.

26 Stanley A. Renshon, "Psychoanalytic Assessments of Character and Performance in Presidents and Candidates: Some Observations on Theory and Method", Jerrold M. Post (ed.), *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2003, p. 132.

27 Margaret G. Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: Trait Analysis", p. 180

28 Margaret G. Hermann, "On 'Foreign Policy Makers, Personality Attributes, and Interviews: A Note on Reliability Problems'", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No 1, 1980, p. 70

29 *Ibid.* p. 5.

## Procedures

Using Profiler Plus,<sup>30</sup> we analyzed ten foreign policy speeches of Donald Trump, comprised approximately of 21,000 words. The number of words for the analyses is amply beyond the 10,000-word standard suggested by Social Science Automation.<sup>31</sup> The speech sample consists of speeches he delivered solely during his election campaign. We chose speeches that focus exclusively on foreign policy, and specifically where he expressed his general views on US foreign policy. To ensure accurate results for the operational code indexes, we developed sampling frames that included speeches of at least 1000 words. All speeches are in English.<sup>32</sup>

For a more nuanced analysis, we have also extracted two subsets of the speeches that focus on MENA politics and ISIS respectively. To do so, we extracted the parts related with these themes from general speeches that were analyzed for general foreign policy orientations. In other words, we did not collect new speeches for MENA and ISIS subsets, rather we analyzed specific parts of our general sample separately.

## Results<sup>33</sup>

Table 2 reports the operational code and leadership trait results for Trump in comparison to norming groups<sup>34</sup> and compared with his speeches on the MENA region in general and ISIS. Figure 1 presents Trump's scores for P1 and I1 for his general foreign policy speeches and for speeches about MENA (-M) and ISIS (-I).

30 Nick Levine and Michael Young, "Leadership Trait Analysis and Threat Assessment with Profiler Plus", *Proceedings of ILC 2014 on 8th International Lisp Conference*, Montreal, QC, Canada — August 14 - 17, 2014. Association for Computing Machinery.

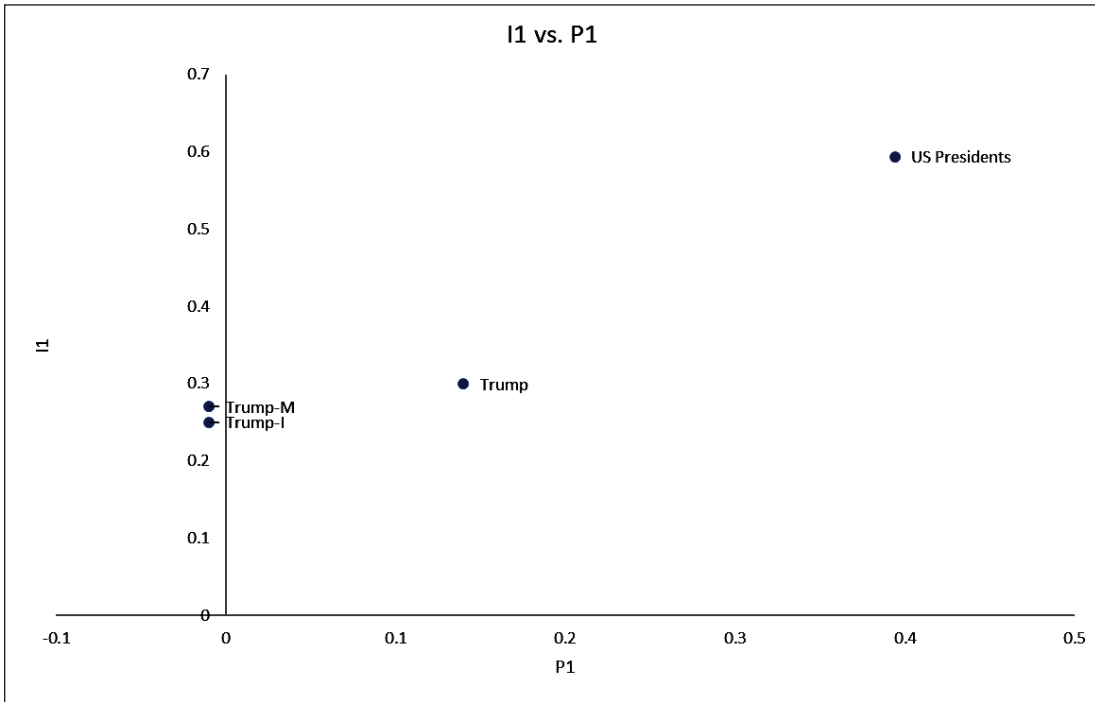
31 Both Margaret G. Hermann (personal correspondence) and Michael D. Young advocate an "as much text as you can get" philosophy to allow for contextualization of scores.

32 New additions to operational code analysis literature have made it possible to make op-code analysis in languages other than English such as in German, Turkish, Arabic and more. For more information on the subject please see: Klaus Brummer, Michael D. Young, Özgür Özdamar, Sercan Canbolat, Consuelo Thiers, Christian Rabini, Katharina Dimmroth, Mischa Hansel, Ameneh Mehvar, "Forum: Coding in Tongues: Developing Non-English Coding Schemes for Leadership Profiling", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 22, No 4, 2020, p. 1039–1067.

33 All data analysis conducted with NCSS 11 Statistical Software Version 11.024. 2016. NCSS, LLC. Kaysville, Utah, USA, [ncss.com/software/ncss](https://ncss.com/software/ncss).

34 In order to see Trump's OCA and LTA scores in comparison to American presidents (norming group) and re-calculate his standard deviation, please visit Halistoprak, B. Toygar; Özgür Özdamar; Michael Young, 2023, "Replication Data for: Do Campaign Speeches Predict Foreign Policy? An Operational Code and Leadership Trait Analysis of Donald Trump's MENA Policies" at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/XKPxdk>.

**Figure 1.** P1 and I1 scores for Trump and the norming groups



Based on the results, it is possible to see that Trump’s P-1 score is above 0. As a leader of an advanced industrialized democracy, his score signifies hostile political universe perception that requires a somewhat confrontational approach. Trump’s overall P-1 (0.14) is more than three standard deviations below the average US President (0.39), indicating that >99% of US Presidents would have a more positive view of the political universe than President Trump. His I-1 score (0.3) is also more than two standard deviations below the average I-1 score (0.59). This suggests that although Trump is likely to exhibit somewhat cooperative strategies, he is also inclined to be more conflictual than >99% of US Presidents.

We also calculated LTA variables for Trump (see Table 2), the results of which were parallel and complementary with the results of the OCA. Both Trump’s BACE (0.42) and P-4 scores (0.29) are at the very high end of the (see Figures 2 and 3) distribution for the US leaders. His DIS score is also far above the mean score in by more than 4 standard deviations, with 0.51, whereas his In-group Bias (IGB) score (0.08) is more than two standard deviations lower than average US Presidents. According to Hermann, leaders with high DIS and low IGB scores tend to perceive the political world as a conflict-prone sphere.<sup>35</sup> Trump, with his high degree of distrust of the Other and his low degree of in-group bias, perfectly fits this typology. These findings are quite in parallel with Turner and Kaarbo’s study that analyzed Trump’s campaign speeches via LTA.<sup>36</sup>

35 Hermann, “Assessing Leadership Style”, p. 28.

36 Turner and Kaarbo, “Predictably unpredictable.”

**Table 2.** General foreign policy speeches vs. MENA and ISIS-focused speeches

	<b>Donald Trump</b> (21000 words)	<b>Donald Trump</b> (MENA, 6755 words)	<b>Donald Trump</b> (ISIS-Terrorism, 6577 words)	<b>US Presidents</b> <sup>37</sup> (n=42)
<b>P-1 Nature of political universe</b> (normally distributed)	0.14, $z = -3.31^{***}$	-0.01, $z = -5.26^{****}$	-0.01, $z = -5.26^{****}$	0.39, $\sigma = 0.07$
<b>P-4 Historical Development</b> (not normally distributed)	0.29	0.28	0.34	0.14, $\sigma = 0.08$
<b>I-1 Strategic Approach to Goals</b> (normally distributed)	0.3, $z = -2.86^{**}$	0.27, $z = -3.15^{***}$	0.25, $z = -3.34^{***}$	0.59, $\sigma = 0.10$
<b>Belief in one own's Ability to Control Events</b> (not normally distributed)	0.42	0.47	0.35	0.26, $\sigma = 0.07$
<b>Need for Power</b> (normally distributed)	0.25, $z = -0.65$	0.23, $z = -1.30$	0.28, $z = 0.33$	0.26, $\sigma = 0.07$
<b>Conceptual Complexity</b> (normally distributed)	0.60, $z = 0.48$	0.55, $z = -1.13$	0.48, $z = -3.38^{***}$	0.59, $\sigma = 0.03$
<b>Self-Confidence</b> (normally distributed)	0.43, $z = 0.95$	0.46, $z = 1.29$	0.35, $z = 0.02$	0.35, $\sigma = 0.09$
<b>Task Orientation</b> (not normally distributed)	0.50, $z = -1.56$	0.51, $z = -1.43$	0.60, $z = -0.28$	0.62, $\sigma = 0.08$
<b>Distrust of Others</b> (normal distribution)	0.51, $z = 4.21^{****}$	0.41, $z = 2.86^{***}$	0.35, $z = 2.05^*$	0.19, $\sigma = 0.07$
<b>In Group Bias</b> (normally distributed)	0.08, $z = -2.53^{**}$	0.08, $z = -2.53^{**}$	0.11, $z = -1.26$	0.13, $\sigma = 0.02$

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*\*\*  $p < .0001$

Trump is more pessimistic when it comes to the context of MENA (lower P-1 score). Interestingly, contrary to the common perception of Trump, his I-1 scores decreases only slightly when it comes for both MENA and ISIS and his DIS scores decreases to 0.41 for MENA and even further to 0.35 for ISIS. In addition, Trump's somewhat higher P-4a score for ISIS suggests he believes that he can make a difference when it comes to the fight against ISIS.

Trump's LTA subset scores acquired from MENA and ISIS speeches reveal a whole different leader compared to other US leaders. Trump's potential reluctance to get involved in the Middle East is also indicated by these scores. For ISIS Trump's BACE score moves from 0.42 to

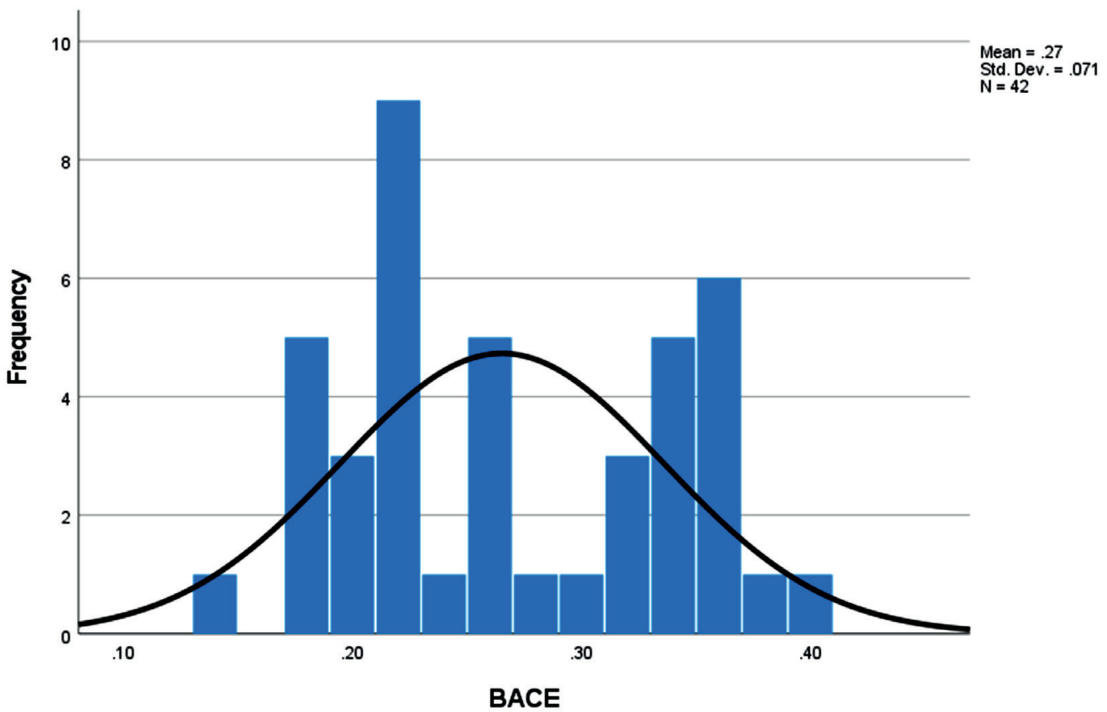
37 From the PsyCL dataset, Schafer and Lambert (2022).

0.35. Interestingly, this score is higher (0.47) for the MENA subset scores. His LTA scores can be read as the signal of a leader profile with a certain degree of interest agenda on the Middle East and yet this agenda does not expand further enough to contain an active fight against every single faraway enemy. Similarly, Trump’s reluctance for an active role in the ISIS problem is observed in his Self Confidence scores, moving from 0.43 to 0.35. In this sense, it is interesting that his aggressive rhetoric, which sometimes emphasizes populist hawkish discourse such as “bombing the hell out of ISIS,”<sup>38</sup> is not apparent in his general foreign policy orientation.

Finally, his conceptual complexity scores decrease from 0.6 to first 0.55 for MENA and then to 0.48 for ISIS. CC score is still above the self-confidence score, which shows pragmatic and responsive characteristic. However, since the gap between these two parameters is lower, it demonstrates that Trump’s degree of openness to incoming information and responsiveness to the interests in the case of ISIS is significantly lower compared to this general profile.

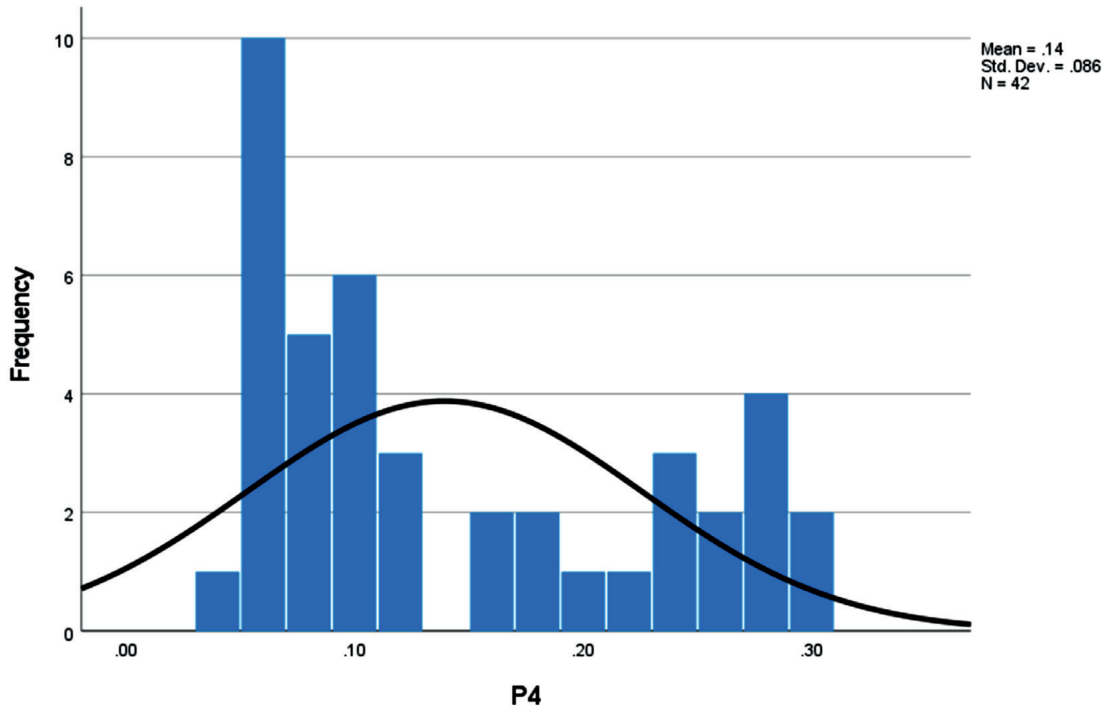
This counter intuitive result corresponds to his stated view of Russia and Syria as allies in the fight against ISIS and his repeated indications that he will partner with Russia. This emphasis on allying with Russia and Syria can be evaluated as the picture of a leader who is reluctant to send US troops to the field and to allocate a significant budget for this, hence leaving the field to Russia in the fight against ISIS and other jihadist factions in the Syrian field.

**Figure 2.** Distribution of BACE scores for US Presidents

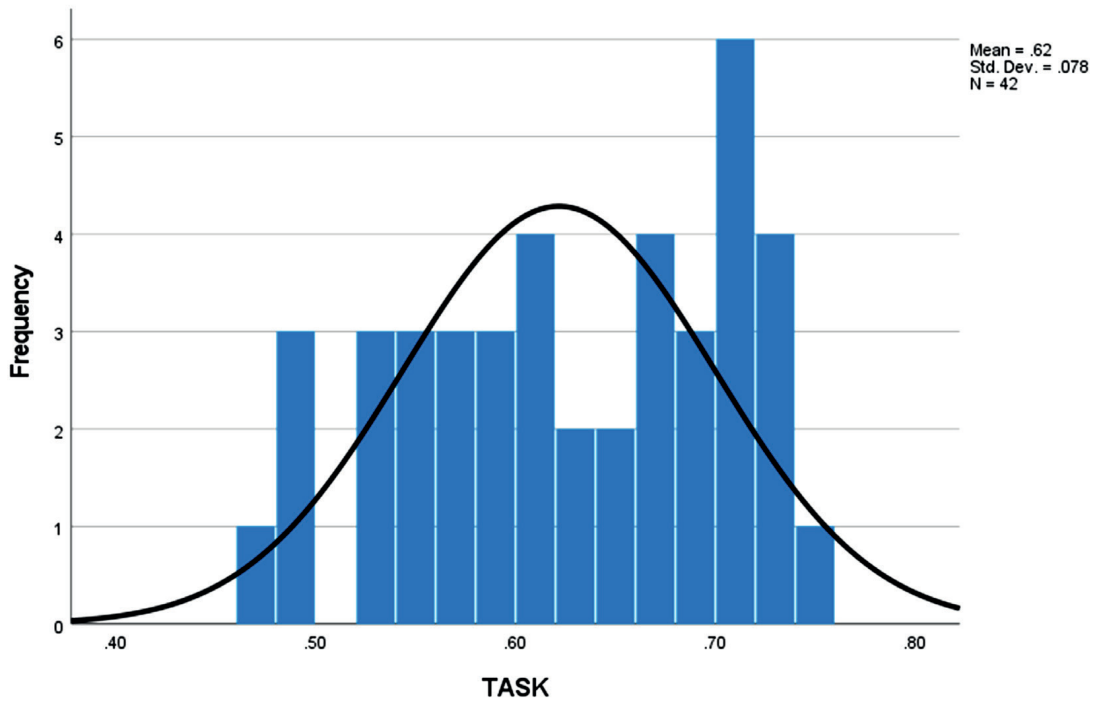


38 Washington Post, “Donald Trump Promises to ‘Bomb the Hell out of ISIS’ in New Radio Ad”, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/11/18/donald-trump-promises-to-bomb-the-hell-out-of-isis-in-new-radio-ad/?utm\\_term=.2a0633d93f25](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/11/18/donald-trump-promises-to-bomb-the-hell-out-of-isis-in-new-radio-ad/?utm_term=.2a0633d93f25) (Accessed 01 February 2017 and 28 June 2022)

**Figure 3.** Distribution of P-4 scores for US Presidents



**Figure 4.** Distribution of TASK scores for US Presidents



Overall, the results suggest that although the difference is not extreme, Trump differs from a typical US leader in certain important parameters. His main divergence from a liberal-interventionist US leader lies in his reluctance to involve in foreign policy decisions that cannot be narrated as a success story in short term. He has a high belief that he can control events, so he is likely to challenge constraints. This result is in line with Trump's campaign record, challenging many material and ideational constraints from both within his party and outside it. Trump also has a significantly low in-group bias score and a very high distrust-of-others score. Trump's uneasy relations with the GOP, colleagues, campaign managers, and international allies conform to the message that this score reveals. His extreme distrust of others was also observed regarding domestic and foreign counterparts. Distrust of others refers to feelings of doubt, uneasiness, and being wary of others and their actions. Such leaders, into which Trump fits, try to do things their own way, do not take advice easily, expect loyalty from their bureaucrats and aim to keep everyone in check. They perceive a zero-sum game in political affairs where if one side wins the other must lose, which makes compromising with them rather difficult.

In their study,<sup>39</sup> which compared Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton as presidential candidates based on their operational code indices, Walker et. al reported findings that are slightly different but still plot Trump within the same typological category with our calculation.<sup>40</sup> Such slight differences are caused by different speech samples used in the coding process. Despite these slight differences, our OCA findings for Trump's leadership style are overlapping with the findings of Walker et.al., which can be considered as an indicator of the validity of our study.

## Discussion of the Results and Trump's Syria Policy

What could be noted robustly as most intriguing implication of the analyses results is that Trump's profile seems at odds with his media coverage. Since his nomination as candidate for the Republican Party (GOP) for US presidency became official, he had widespread media coverage that put forward his aggressive discourse targeting all the 'Others' in his world of meanings. Accordingly, the audience is generally convinced that his foreign policy orientation would be equally aggressive and antagonizing. Both during his election campaign and after taking office, Trump did not hesitate to use his Twitter account<sup>41</sup> to pursue foreign policy goals while working on building a public image as a skillful foreign policy master through his blatant and aggressive discourse. In fact, his aggressive foreign policy related controversies and social media activism are interpreted as the manifestation of his anti-diplomacy<sup>42</sup> approach to the conduct of foreign policy. Yet the results from OCA and LTA suggest that his foreign policy tendencies are rather drawing a pragmatic presidential profile that would avoid direct conflict

39 Stephen Walker et al., "The Operational Codes of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton", Alex Mintz and Lesley Terris (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Behavioral Political Science*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 1-24.

40 While we calculated the master beliefs as P-1: 0.14, P-4: 0.29, I-1: 0.3, Walker et al. reported P-1: 0.26, P-4: 0.3 and I-1: 0.19

41 Ali Şevket Ovalı, "Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinde Twitter Diplomasisi", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 17, No 65, 2020, p. 23-45.

42 Seçkin Barış Gülmez, Nihal Yetkin Karakoç, and Didem Buhari Gülmez, "Trump Döneminde Diplomatik Aktör Olarak Çevirmenler", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 17, No 65, 2020, p. 66.

when the positive payoff is not expected in short term. Although this seems at odds with his aggressive campaign profile, it could be also considered as consistent with his populist inclinations. At this point, it is perhaps necessary to briefly discuss the constituting elements of Trump's populism.

The literature on populism has attributed various meanings to the term. A wing in the literature emphasizes that authoritarianism and populism are closely linked; in fact, the authoritarian world view is inherent,<sup>43</sup> hence embedded in populism.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, this wing of the literature argues that populism relies on a discourse that vocalizes social and political ideals in a macho authoritarian tone, sounding sympathetic to the ordinary man on the street but also being distant to the realities of socio-economic wisdom. Holsti and Rosenau<sup>45</sup> define populism, on the other hand, as a political position which combines economic liberalism with social conservatism. Mead<sup>46</sup> argues that Trump's version of populism converges to a Jacksonian stance which instrumentalizes nationalism, economic interventionism and challenges some foundational elements of liberal order. Consequently, if it is difficult to generalize about populism and it resists definition,<sup>47</sup> Trump's version is even more so as it represents an amorphous set of ideas characterized by different aspects of all these attributions to populism. The most prominent characteristics of Trump's political orientation are pragmatic short termism and a clear transactionalist approach to policy making. These policies can be considered as clear departures from what is defined as traditionally adopted US 'globalist' foreign policy.<sup>48</sup>

One can better read between the lines of President Trump's campaign speeches. In fact, Trump signals that he prefers a pragmatic path in his foreign policy making, which sometimes emerges as a non-interventionist foreign policy. Donald Trump's pragmatic win/lose view of the world is evident in his foreign policy inclinations. In this regard, Trump sees foreign relations as a policy that needs to provide returns in the short term. Trump constantly emphasized how much more the US spends in comparison to its allies to maintain the relationships between them. His business-influenced foreign policy view is manifested in his answer to a foreign policy question asked in early 2016:

"We are not being reimbursed for our protection of many of the countries that you'll be talking about, that, including Saudi Arabia (...) But we protect countries, and take tremendous monetary hits on protecting countries. We lose, everywhere. We lose monetarily, everywhere."<sup>49</sup>

43 Kurt Weyland, "Latin America's Authoritarian Drift: the Threat from the Populist Left", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No 3, 2013, p. 18-32.

44 Kurt Weyland, "Populism and Authoritarianism", Carlos de la Torre (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*, London, Routledge, 2018, p. 319-333.

45 Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, "Liberals, Populists, Libertarians, and Conservatives: The Link between Domestic and International Affairs", *International Political Science Review*, Vol.17, No 1, 1996, p. 35.

46 Walter Russell Mead, "The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order", *Foreign Affairs*, No 96, 2017, p. 2.

47 Nadia Urbinati, "Political Theory of Populism", *Annual Review of Political Science*, No 22, 2019, p. 111-127.

48 Gültekin Sümer, "Amerikan Dış Politikasının Kökenleri ve Amerikan Dış Politik Kültürü", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 5, No 19, 2008, p.125.

49 "Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views", *New York Times*, 26 June 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html?_r=0) (Accessed 21 January 2017 and 20 June 2022).

In accordance with his short-run profit expectancy around foreign policy, Trump seems to advocate not getting involved in what is not directly related to the US. However, rejecting allegations and criticisms that he is an isolationist, Trump formulates his general foreign policy stance as “I’m not isolationist, but I am ‘America First.’”<sup>50</sup>

In Trump’s foreign policy view, traditional US alliances are also subject to question. For example, he feels that NATO, despite its benefits, is a burden for the United States. Again, his views on this issue are related to payback.<sup>51</sup> He criticizes NATO of being obsolete because of its financial structure, which relies heavily on US contributions. He argues that NATO’s over-involvement in some foreign policy issues has jeopardized good US relations with Russia: “NATO is something that at the time was excellent. Today, it must be changed (...) And one of the things [in NATO’s agenda] that I hated seeing is Ukraine. ... when the Ukrainian problem arose, you know, not so long ago, and we and Russia were getting very confrontational.”<sup>52</sup> In short, Trump did not prefer NATO to take primacy in US foreign policy, as he felt that would require the alliance to become involved in rather minor foreign policy issues that would burden the US financially.

Trump appears to be a populist leader who does not refrain from aggressive discourse, especially when his focus is on the Middle East and terrorism problems. Such discourse should not be considered solely foreign policy stances but also they represent the elements of a populist election campaign. Trump’s general aversion to an involved foreign policy is evident in his statements on the Middle East. He states that the US decision to go to war in Iraq was a dramatic mistake.<sup>53</sup> In a similar vein, Trump thinks that direct US involvement in the Syrian crisis would further destabilize the region and increase the burden on the US budget. In short, although media coverage of Trump implies an aggressive foreign policy toward the Middle East, Trump’s campaign speeches and our analysis signaled reluctance to become involved in Syria.

When it comes to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), although Trump’s speeches use aggressive and sometimes militaristic tones, these should be considered as campaign speeches targeting domestic groups in the elections. In fact, he has never articulated his counter terrorism strategy toward ISIS.<sup>54</sup> Rather, his policy resembled that of late in Obama’s second term, which can be summarized as working with local partners on the ground. In this regard, arming, training, and advising local partners, using a relatively small number of US troops on the ground and initiating sudden airstrikes have been the elements of Trump’s *modus operandi* in his foreign policy decisions related to ISIS and the Syrian War.<sup>55</sup>

Based on this analysis, it is fair to suggest that Trump’s decision to withdraw US troops from the Syria is not so shocking for those who analyzed his campaign speeches. The results

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, (Accessed 01 July 2022).

54 Gerald Feierstein, “Trump’s Middle East Policy At One Year: Policy Lacks Strategic Coherence Despite Rhetoric”, *Middle East Institute, Policy Forecast-2*, 2018.

55 Brian McKeon, “Trump’s ‘Secret Plan’ to Defeat ISIS Looks a lot like Obama’s”, *Foreign Policy*, No 31, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/31/trumps-secret-plan-to-defeat-isis-looks-a-lot-like-obamas/> (Accessed 28 June 2022).

from OCA and LTA analysis of 2016 campaign speeches reveal a foreign policy orientation that is open to a certain degree to incorporate incoming information from consultants, a willingness to control the course of events and increasing sense of hostility (even more so in the context of MENA and ISIS). Considered together with the reading into his speeches, Trump's decision to withdraw gradually from Syria can be seen as a not-so-surprising outcome of his short termism and pragmatic approach to foreign policy.

## Conclusion

Foreign policy is made by human decision-makers. Leaders are key determinants of foreign policy. Donald J. Trump's election victory in 2016 was a surprising outcome for many and some of his foreign policy decisions caused controversy both in the United States and elsewhere. He used unusual and sometimes quite aggressive discourse both through his social media accounts and in his press meetings, spontaneous or planned addresses. In accordance with this unusual presidential image, some of his foreign policy decisions took students of US foreign policy by surprise. His sudden decision to withdraw from Syria, for instance, is considered a deviation from what it would be considered expectable and mainstream US foreign policy. Our study suggests that he gave the signals of such foreign policy orientations in his speeches during the election campaign.

Our study's findings overlap with the media image, while further reading into the speeches suggests that his foreign policy orientations may sometimes diverge from the picture that he presents in the election campaign and beyond. His OCA scores in primary parameters, LTA scores, and a qualitative analysis of his speeches indicate a presidential profile that defines foreign policy in quite pragmatic terms. Although his political beliefs do not plot him in a complete different presidential typology from the rest of US and Western leaders, he is plotted at the margins of what is considered a typical US president. In fact, when context-specific speeches are coded, Trump appears to be a president with a more hostile perception of political others in MENA. A further analysis of his speeches also shows his pragmatic approach to foreign policy, which seeks quick returns that can be narrated as sagas of success in domestic politics.

Specifically, we observed a consistency between Donald Trump's campaign speeches and his actual foreign policy vis a vis MENA and ISIS during his tenure. President Trump's operational code analysis has shown that, although he sees the political world as conflictual, his P1 scores are not extreme. However, we have observed a significant decrease in his P1 scores as he spoke about MENA and ISIS. His LTA scores also showed that Donald Trump has high levels of distrust when it comes to MENA and ISIS. While writing the first draft of this paper in late 2016, we concluded that Trump seems to be pragmatic and not a particularly extremely aggressive leader; we expected him not to be an interventionist and to not involve himself too much in MENA affairs due to his high distrust and negative views of MENA and ISIS-related issues. During his tenure, his policies were in line with these findings.

Three points can also be noted as larger implications of this study. First, it demonstrates that leader-focused approaches are useful tools to understand the dynamics of unusual, unexpected and surprising foreign policy decisions. Foreign policy decision-making process

is a multilayered and multifactorial one. States build grand strategies and consolidate their foreign policy orientations through the organizational learning capacities of their bureaucratic frameworks. This is why certain foreign policy actions are considered manifestations of *de facto* official foreign policy of a state. Decisive departures from such patterns are usually the outcome of a change in the leadership. LTA and OCA are two useful analytical tools with broad explanatory capacity to explain such changes in foreign policy by focusing on the psychology of leaders. Second, our study shows that campaign speeches can be used as good sources of data to understand the foreign policy orientations of leaders. Leaders, especially in liberal democracies, are subject to public accountability and give their speeches with this in mind. Campaign speeches can be considered significant binding texts for heads of executives. Therefore, it is fair to suggest that foreign policy orientations can also be traced in campaign speeches. Last, our study shows the importance of contextualized sampling. In our study, we analyze two additional subset text samples. These subset sampling helped us to explore how particular foreign policy context can impact the perception of a leader. This sampling approach can be a good path to follow for scholars of FPA who aim to understand how and why leaders take unusual foreign policy decisions in particular contexts.

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