

## Abstract

Turkey has responded uniquely to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, taking up a mediator role. In this project I seek to shed light on Turkey's response as well as the close relationship between Russian president Vladimir Putin and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. I analyzed the effect of the leaders' populism as well as Turkish and Russian foreign policy. I found many similarities in the way both leaders combined populist rhetoric with historical, religious, and nationalist rhetoric. Putin and Erdogan used supplemental ideologies to portray themselves as the representatives of an exclusive ingroup under siege from foreign elites. I also found that ideology affected both countries' foreign policy in similar ways. Both leaders justified a more aggressive, interventionist foreign policy using populism and supplementary ideologies. I contend that those similarities can be described as pragmatic populism, a leadership strategy that President Putin and President Erdogan have used to solidify their authoritarian grip on power, justify aggressive foreign policy moves, and crack down on dissent.

## Objectives

With this project I wanted to explain the similarities between President Erdogan of Turkey and President Putin of Russia by thinking about both leaders' populist ideologies. I especially wanted to focus on the similar foreign policies of Turkey in Russia. Both countries have taken aggressive military action against neighboring groups: Russia in Ukraine, and Turkey in Syria. The maps show that both actions were somewhat similar, even though the reaction in the West has been different.

## Methods

I began by looking at Ben Stanley's conception of populism as a thin ideology,[1] then worked to compare the populism of President Erdogan and President Putin. I looked at three salient categories of supplementary ideologies: historical, religious, and nationalist. In this early section, I found the Gönül Tol's description of Erdogan's pragmatic use of ideology influential. [2] I drew on sources that analyzed Putin and Erdogan's discourse and sources that analyzed Turkish and Russian foreign policy to determine how both leaders used supplementary ideologies. I also focused on the role of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Turkey's military operations in Syria.

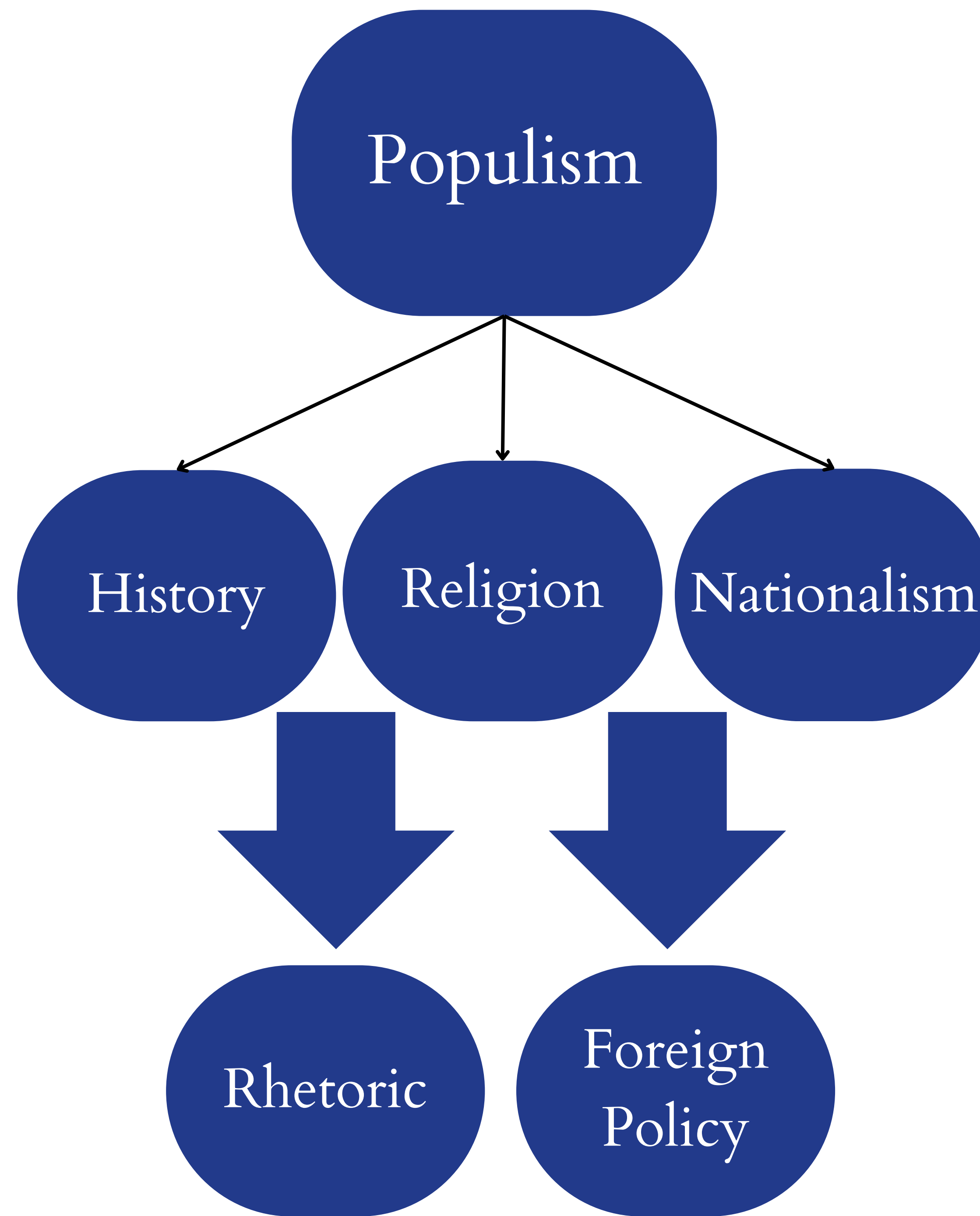
## Acknowledgements

I am so grateful to my faculty mentor Dr. Önder, the Laidlaw Foundation, our program director Colleen Dougherty, and all my fellow Laidlaw Scholars for helping me on this research journey.

## References

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## Theoretical Model



## Two Aggressive Military Actions



## Religion

### Similarities

- State influence over religion through the Diyanet, the Russian Orthodox Church
- Restoration of religion after decades of Kemalist and Soviet secularism
- Faith in the construction of the "people"

### Differences

- Erdogan explicitly uses religious rhetoric learned through his religious education
- Putin uses religious settings but not religious rhetoric: a result of his secular education [4]
- In Turkey there is a close relationship between religious and neo-Ottoman narratives that portray Turkey as the leader of the *ummah*
- Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, has been a staunch supporter of Putin, even after the invasion of Ukraine

## Nationalism

### Similarities

- Anti-Westernism is at the heart of Putin and Erdogan's nationalist populism; both leaders define the virtuous people in opposition to corrupt Western elites
- Both leaders turned to nationalism in response to "popular demand" (Erdogan in 2015 and Putin in 2012)
- Putin's invasion of Ukraine is an example of "existential nationalism," [5] because Putin claims that Ukraine's independent existence is a threat to Russia
- Similarly, there is a large existential nationalist component to Turkey's fight against the Kurds

### Differences

- In Russia, both nationalism and imperialism are influential ideologies
- Putin has used nationalist populism as a way of suppressing dissenting views

## Findings

I found many similarities in the pragmatic populism of Putin and Erdogan.

- Both leaders commonly draw on nationalist sentiment, and this has led to aggressive military actions in Ukraine and Syria
- Both leaders use glorified portrayals of the imperial past to claim a status as a great power in the modern day
- Although Erdogan is more comfortable using religion in his rhetoric, both leaders have used religion in order to claim that they represent the pious people of their nation
- These similarities had a noticeable affect on Turkish and Russian foreign policy, as shown by the similar military actions in Syria and Ukraine
- Putin and Erdogan use the narratives that suit their purposes best in the moment, pragmatically changing their rhetoric to justify their chosen foreign policies

## History

### Similarities

- Both Putin and Erdogan glorify their country's imperial past
- Both claim that they will restore the glory of the imperial past
- Historical narratives support irredentism, interventionism in Ukraine and Syria based on the idea of a mistaken partition/artificial borders

### Differences

- Ahmet Davutoglu, former Prime Minister of Turkey, invented a unique but influential concept of Turkey at the center of Afro-Eurasia
- Putin himself has written a long, revisionist narrative of the 'shared' history of the Russian and Ukrainian people [3]