

**T.C.
ISTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**TOWARD DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATISATION: THE IMPACT OF THE
DONALD TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ON THE LATEST AUTHORITARIAN
ACTIONS OF VLADIMIR PUTIN AND JINPING XI**

MA Thesis by

**JAMESLEO OCHE
2000000459**

**Department : International Relations
Programme: International Relations**

Supervisor : Asst. Prof. Dr. Nazlı Çağın BİLGİLİ

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Members of Examining Committee:

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Hazl Papuççular

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Nihal Köseoğlu

June 2022

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Teşekkür ederim. (Thank you)

JAMESLEO OCHE

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all those who die while promoting democracy, human right and international peace and security.



Üniversite : **İstanbul Kültür Üniversitesi**
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Dalı : **Uluslararası İlişkiler**
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ÖZET

Trump yönetimine ilişkin mevcut akademik tartışmanın temelini oluşturan kilit sorular şunlardır: Trump'ın "Önce Amerika" dış politikasını nasıl kavramsallaştırıyoruz? Trump yönetiminin fiili icra emirleri, politikaları ve eylemleri nelerdir? Bu yürütme emirleri, politikaları ve eylemleri, ABD'nin geleneksel demokrasiyi destekleme dış politikasından Putin ve Xi'nin otoriter hedeflerine nasıl geçiyor? Bu çalışma, neden şu sorulara cevap bulmayı amaçlıyor: 1) Trump'ın dış politikası, ABD'nin küresel siyasetteki rolüne yönelik izolasyonist bir büyük stratejiye odaklandı; 2) Trump yönetimi, Putin ve Xi gibi otoriterler için büyük bir kazanç ve demokrasi için büyük bir kayıp; 3) Belirli bir ABD yönetimi demokrasinin desteklenmesine öncelik vermezse, ABD'de demokrasinin azalmasının küresel bir düşüşe yol açması muhtemeldir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasinin teşviki, Önce Amerika dış politikası

University : **Istanbul Kultur University**
Institute : **Institute of Graduate Studies**
Department : **International Relations**
Programme : **International Relations**
Supervisor : **Asst. Prof. Dr. Nazlı Çağın BİLGİLİ**
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ABSTRACT

The key questions underpinning the current academic debate on the Trump administration are: How do we conceptualize the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy? What are the actual executive orders, policies and actions of the Trump administration? How do these executive orders, policies and actions shift from U.S traditional foreign policy of democracy promotion to the authoritarian objectives of Putin and Xi? This study aims to find answers to these questions, why arguing that: 1) the Trump foreign policy centered on an isolationist grand strategy to U.S role in global politics; 2) the Trump administration is a huge gain for authoritarians like Putin and Xi, and a hug loss for democracy; 3) a decline of democracy in the U.S is likely to lead to global decline if a certain U.S administration does not prioritize democracy promotion.

Keywords: Democracy promotion, America First foreign policy

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List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
CAATSA	Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act
CAC	Cyberspace Administration of China
CSF	Civil Society Forum
CMC	Central Military Commission
CNN	Cable News Network
DACA	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EED	European Endowment for Democracy
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EPC	European Policy Center
ERP	European Recovery Program
EU	European Union
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MC	Military Committee
MAGA	“Make America Great Again”
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Alliance
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NSA	National Security Agency
NYT	New York Times
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PAP----- People's Armed Police

PLA-----People's Liberation Army

Tacis----- Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States

UNGA-----United Nations General Assembly

UN.....United Nations

USAID ----- United State Agency for International Development

WB.....World Bank

WTO -----World Trade Organisation

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to understand and explain the impact of the Donald Trump administration on the latest authoritarian actions of Putin and Xi. In order to achieve this goal, the study answers the following questions as they underpin the foundational academic debate on the Trump administration: What foreign policy doctrine define the Trump administration? How does the Trump administration drift from U.S traditional foreign policy of democracy promotion? And, what are the actual executive orders, policies, and presidential actions of the Trump administration that impact on the latest authoritarian actions of Putin and Xi? As the study unpacks and explains the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy, the objective of the policy, the features of the policy, as well as what informs the policy, the introductory section highlights the focus, central arguments, and organization of the research. After establishing the background of the study, the chapter one concludes with a brief discussion on the purpose and importance of the research within and outside of the body of existing literature.

Donald Trump was the winner of the 2016 United States presidential election held on Tuesday, November 8, 2016 which was the 58th quadrennial presidential election of the United States. Trump consequently became the 45th president of the United States of America. (Bercker Bernie, Cable News Network, November 20, 2016). He contested under the Republican ticket alongside Indiana governor Mike Pence as the vice president, against the Democratic ticket of former US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton and Tim Kaine, who was a U.S. senator from Virginia. Out of the 538 members of the Electoral College, the minimum of 270 votes are required for victory, and Trump was favored with 304 electoral votes ahead of Clinton’s 227. (Wallace Gregory, CNN, November 20, 2016). The victory of Donald Trump was considered one of the historic upsets in US presidential election. (Martin, 2016). According to Crockett (2017), Donald Trump became the first US president with neither prior public service nor military experience. Following his inauguration on Friday, January 20, 2017, which took place on the West Front of the U.S Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., Trump marked the beginning of a four-year term as President of a country traditionally dedicated to the promotion of democracy. (Carothers, 2017).

He took the presidential oath of office under the judicial administration of Chief Justice John Roberts and pledged to put 'America First' and 'Make America Great Again'. (Merrick Garland, Supreme Court of the United States, Press Conference January 20 2017)

As Trump delivered his inauguration speech, the leitmotiv running at full length in his inauguration speech was: 'America first!' and 'Make America Great Again.' 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) represents an electoral campaign slogan used by American politicians to elicit massive support. The slogan was created in 1979 and first used by former US president, Ronald Reagan during and after his 1980 presidential campaign (Martosko & David, 2015: 12). It was a time in which the United States was experiencing worsening economy as marked by severe inflation and high unemployment rate. Martosko & David accounts that after Reagan's presidential era (1981 -1989), the slogan has been used by a variety of U.S politicians as a reflection and resurgence of the Reagan presidency.

Trump trademarked the slogan 'America First' and used it in both his presidential campaign and National Interest Review. In fact, 'America First will be the overriding feature of my presidency' dominated Trump's inauguration speech. (Trump's Campaign Speech, 2016). According to Harris (2020:23), from the beginning of Trump's administration, he showed consistent pattern of admiration for, and cooperation with Russian President, Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Jinping Xi. Lamond & Bergmann (2018:8) argued that Putin sponsored a massive disinformation campaign that targeted U.S voters in support of Trump, using American fronts to pump money in support of Trump's campaign, beginning with influencing Republican policies and Trump's victory at the primaries. This claim is corroborated by a January 10 2018 report of US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations titled 'Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for US National Security'. According to Lamond & Bergmann (2018), Putin's strategy was crystal clear. The authors argued that, following his annexation of Crimea and the Donbas issues in 2014, the international community had diplomatically weakened Putin: first, Russia's economy impeded amid declining oil prices. This was followed by Putin's increasing pressure from his inner circle, who also faced severe US sanctions. Much like these authors, Tisdall (2017) in his 'Trump, Putin and Xi: a Year of Tough-Guy Leaders and Foolish Brinkmanship' argued that Putin's brinkmanship with Trump as a cog

in the wheel of freedom and democracy was ever going to materialize to expectation level because of the political and charismatic influence of the triumvirates.

Ian Bremmer (2017) in his 'The Workings of the Trump-Putin Relationship', argued that there is neither a notable foreign policy analyst who can defend Trump's invitation of U.S to a singularly enamored relations with Putin, nor a justifiable political rationality to do so, considering the oppositeness of values and objectives in US-Russia politics. He maintained that while Putin was not going to explicitly coordinate the Trump administration, he sought for a Trump-Kremlin indirect relationship that could turn American foreign policy in Eastern Europe on its head for Putin's Eastern European foreign policy objectives. According to Special Counsel, Robert Mueller, and the consistent revelations of his probe on the collusion of Trump campaigns with Russia, Trump was expected to distance his administration from Putin's Russia in order to dispel the clear indications that he is beholden to Putin and Russia. Instead, the Trump administration adopted policies and took positions that aligned perfectly with Putin's authoritarian goals. (US Department of Justice, April 18 2019).

According to Lamond & Bergmann (2018:8), Trump softened U.S adversarial position against Russia, especially within the Republican Party where he consistently shifted the party's generations-long hawkish perspectives on Putin and Russia to Putin's bargain. Putin's goal of destabilizing the US from within, requires the role of an influential insider. The authors argued that Trump frequently attacked US media, institutions, and US backed international organizations such as WHO, WTO and NATO, boosting Putin's morale on legitimizing his authoritarian principle of government on the global stage. The authors mentioned that in trying to legitimize his authoritarian principles, Putin's relations with the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has been further enriched, following Putin's huge role in Lukashenko's victory over the massive protest for his resignation on May 24 2020. Lamond & Bergmann continued with the assumption that it is Putin's strategy to advance Kremlin's narrative in order to shape global perceptions, and Trump repeatedly took sides with Putin across a wide range of global issues, particularly those bordering on democracy and democratization process. The more Putin undermines democratic values domestically and globally, the more Trump repeatedly created a more permissive political

Jordyn Phelps writing for *CNN*, (*CNN*, June 28 2019) titled 'Trump Blasts 'Fake News' in Front of Putin at G-20' during Trump's trip to the G20 summit in Japan', reported that during a photo session before the meeting, Trump said this to Putin: 'Get rid of them. Fake news and its holders. The media! You don't have this problem in your country but the US is over stuck.' Putin acquiesced with the following response: 'Russia has this issue too, but it is handled differently'. (Jordyn Phelps, *CNN*, June 28 2019). Jordyn Phelps, pointed to the arrest and sentencing of investigative journalist after he produced a rich volume of valid reports detailing significant size of corruption in the Russian government. Following was a mysterious death of another leading investigative reporter Maxim Borodin who mysteriously fell from his fifth story floor. (Mary Ilyushina, *CNN*, April 16 2018). Trump's direct and blatant attack on the press was easily advancing Putin's media clampdown in Russia. (Harris, 2020). Putin's objectives and strategy to regain international recognition after his isolation, following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 were well delivered by the Trump administration. Trump showed all the flashpoints that support the alleged meddling of Russia in the 2016 US elections. While Trump dismissed all allegations of Russian interference, he put no policy in place to prevent future allegations or interference. Trump was consequently at odds with his own intelligence community throughout his four years in office according to Muller (2020).

According to Rosie Gray in *The Atlantic* (May 25 2017), at the opening of NATO's 750 million Euros new headquarters in the city of Brussels on May 25 2017, Trump declined from reaffirming US commitment to Article 5 of the Atlantic Treaty. The Article 5 of the Atlantic Treaty asserts that an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all members. (Karatas, 2020). The principle of Article 5 has served as the foundation of the transatlantic security alliance for seventy years, and has only been invoked once at the course of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. (Santamato, 2021). The invocation of the Article 5 had significant impact on NATO, and the US specifically, to the degree that the Article 5 is considered the treaty's most important principle. (Karatas, 2020:6). Trump's attempt to withdraw the US from NATO during his first summit with NATO leaders, therefore pointed sharply to aiding Putin's foreign policy objectives. (Dombrowski, 2017). However, since Trump's position was contrary to the position of his national security team on the Article 5, he retraced his step, eventually committing to the Article 5 of the

Atlantic treaty. (Barnes & Cooper, 2019). Trump continued to attack specific NATO members that are particularly opposed to Putin's interests. For instance, Trump repeatedly attacked Montenegro for its NATO membership decision as Putin's criticism, claiming in the following words: 'Montenegro has very aggressive people' and consistently undermine the Article 5 of the Atlantic Treaty. So why should the US defend Montenegro systematically?' (CNN Politics, Ryan Browne's interview with Trump on 'Why the US is obligated to Defend Montenegro' July 18 2018)

The FBI in May 2017 formally launched a counter-intelligence investigation into Donald Trump's presidency to determine the constituents of his close relations with Putin and the Russian government (*The New York Times*, January 6 2017). According to the U.S Intelligence Report, January 6 2017, the official inquiry folded into the Special Counsel's investigation, focused specifically on whether or not Putin was enjoying direct political influence over Trump. While the outcome of this investigation did not include any concrete evidence against Trump, Trump's administration repeatedly profited Putin's authoritarian foreign policy goals, often at the expense of US democracy priorities and the core priorities of traditional US allies and western partners. (Tisdall, 2017). On January 26, 2017, the United States Intelligence Community later concluded that the Putin-led Russian government had interfered in the 2016 US elections in favor of Donald Trump. Suri (2017) argued Trump interfered in the 2016 US elections in order to 'undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, disparage Clinton, and damage her electability and presidential potentiality'. A Special Counsel investigation alleging Russian role in the Trump presidential victory also began in May 2017 and ended in March 2019. The investigation also revealed that Russia interfered in the 2016 US election in favor of Trump 'in sweeping and systematic fashion'. (U.S Intelligence Report, March 6 2019).

The investigation of the US Intelligence Community however did not establish that members of the Trump campaign conspired with the Putin's regime. (Jacob Pramuk, 2017). According to Special Counsel, Robert Mueller, and the consistent revelations of his probe on the collusion of Trump campaigns with Russia, Trump was expected to distance his administration from Putin's Russia in order to dispel the clear indications that he was beholden to Putin and Russia. Instead, the Trump administration adopted policies and took positions that aligned perfectly with Putin's authoritarian goals. There are numerous indicators to demonstrate that Putin's

return on investment from the Trump administration is remarkably high. (US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, January 10 2018). While Putin did not explicitly coordinate or direct the Trump administration, Kremlin greatly benefited from Trump's election, in such a way that Trump's 'burden sharing' foreign policy decisions toward NATO, turned American foreign policy in Eastern Europe on its head to the clear realization of Russia's Eastern European foreign policy objectives (Dimitrova, 2017).

According to Michael Knigge (2019), against the EU and in support of Putin's objective, the Trump administration started by downgrading the status of the EU Ambassador to the U.S, from the equivalent of a country to a 'head of delegation,' without an official notification of the ambassador and the EU. The author accounted that Mike Pompeo who was US Secretary of State under the Trump administration also in Brussels disparaged the EU in December 2018 in a speech attacking the EU while calling on member states to reassert their sovereignty and independent domestic and foreign interests. Karatas (2020) assumed that a unified Europe with political and economic stability, valuing human rights and liberal democracy, will greatly contain Russia's pro-authoritarian expansionism in Eastern Europe and beyond. Haukkala (2009) had argued that a vibrant liberal and democratic EU contrasts sharply with Putin's strategic objective in Europe, making a divided EU plays into Putin's strategy, and therefore enabling Russia to pressure former Soviet satellite states to expand its influence among independent EU members. (p.25). Since unity in EU obstructs Putin's efforts to bully its neighbors while building alliances with EU members, Trump consistently supported Kremlin-backed parties in the bid to weaken EU's unity and stability. According to Trump, 'the EU was set up to take advantage of the US. It gives nothing back to the US.' (Trump, Press Statement, December, 15 2017).

The Trump administration was considered by many pundits as largely marking Putin's authoritarian return on investment with indicators to show for it. (Rucker & Harris, 2020). The authors argued that Putin perceives NATO and the broader transatlantic alliance system as Russia's greatest strategic adversaries. Weakening and dividing the transatlantic alliance is therefore at the center of Putin's foreign policy objectives and strategy. (Sokhey, 2020). According to Bergmann, Lamond, & Dessel (2018), Trump paid out with his 'burden sharing' policy by undermining US relations with European allies. The authors argued that Trump consistently questioned US

leadership commitment to NATO and called for US withdrawal (p.24). In an interview with *The New York Times*, (May 16 2018), Trump argued that the US should not defend or assist NATO allies who do not ‘fulfil their own obligations to the US.’

Away from Russia’s Putin to China’s Xi, Yuan (2021) argued that the Washington approach to Xi before the Trump era was a perfect blend of economic competition and cooperation with democratic incentives. The author argued that Xi from a position of confidence in Trump’s support and personal power, set clear-eyed objectives, and executed coherent pro-Communist strategies in Hong Kong and Taiwan during the Trump administration. The Trump administration was silent on the disappearance of the President of Interpol in China. (US House Hearing, 116 Congress, Tools of Transnational Repression: How Autocrats Punish Dissents Overseas). In September 2018, the president of the international policing agency (Interpol), mysteriously disappeared without traces in China. (Interpol Media Statement, CNN, October 5 2018). Media outlets later reported his detention by Chinese authorities headed by president Xi. (Kim Willsher, *The Guardian*, October 10 2018). Such audacious step, highlighting the increasingly authoritarian party system of president Xi under the Trump administration, only showed how the Trump administration facilitated Xi’s authoritarian objectives. (Yuan, 2021). According to the author in his ‘Opinion: China’s Autocrats End Democracy in Hong Kong’, Trump was clearly silent on Xi’s systemic assault on the international institution and human rights abuses, especially in Hong Kong.

Dombrowski (2017) in his ‘Does Trump have a Grand Strategy?’ argued that no US presidency and grand strategy spurred as much debate among pundits and critics as Trump’s ‘America First’ administration. The author as Dimitrova (2017) assumed that the key discourse at inception centered on the reasons why millions of Americans watched the Trump administration exceed limits on controversiality and provocativeness, becoming increasingly anti-establishment and anti-democracy; policy by policy, statement by statement. However, based on Article I, Section 3, Clause 6 of the U.S. Constitution; ‘the Senate shall have the sole Power to try all Impeachments’, Trump faced impeachment trials twice; first, for abuse of power, and secondly for Capitol Hill attack on January 6 2021. (Nicholas Fandos, *NYT*, January 13 2021). House Speaker Nancy Pelosi signed the articles of impeachment against Trump on January 15 2020. (Herb Scribner, *CNN*, January 15

2020). The first impeachment trial of Trump which started on January 16, 2020, and ended with his acquittal on February 5 2020 was expected to turn a new leaf in his administration's attack on democracy and its institutions, but did not. (David, 2019).

Following a period of inquiry between September to November 2019, Trump was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives on December 18, 2019 as the articles of impeachment charged him with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. (Servet Guneerigok, Washington Post, December 18 2019). As one already building a pyramid of influence among his party, the Republican majority already on his side, voted on January 21 to reject 11 amendments proposed by Democrats, requesting subpoena authority to introduce testimonial evidences from current and former White House officials, as well as some of Trump administration documents not made available to House investigators. (Lynch & Ulmer, 2022). According to the New York Times, February 2020, on February 5 2020, Trump was acquitted by the Senate on both impeachment articles, as neither article produced the required two-thirds supermajority of senate support. (David Morgan, Susan Cornwell, & Patricia Zengerle, CNN, February 5 2020). 55 Republican senators voted against the charge of abuse of power, while all 53 Republican senators voted against the charge of obstruction of Congress. The difference was senator Mitt Romney who eventually became the first U.S. senator in history to support the removal of a president of his own party through impeachment vote. (Nicholas Fandos, NTY, February, 2020). While all of these were expected to deter the Trump administration's clamp down on the rule of law and democratic norms, there were signals falling on deaf ears. (Julian, 2020). Undeterred, Trump was once again on January 13, 2021, faced a second impeachment trial at the House of Representatives following the 2021 Capitol Hill invasion. As expected of his increasing pyramid of influence within his Republican party, Trump was acquitted by the Senate a second time on February 13, 2021. (Trial Memorandum of the United States House of Representatives in the Impeachment Trial of Doonald Trump, January 13 2021)

After Trump's twin aquittal, the debate on the exact doctrine which define his 'America First' foreign policy ensued. (Dimitrova, 2017). Understanding the impact of his policies, executive orders, tweets, and press releases on America's role in global affairs, with specific reference to the liberal international order are necessary to the understanding of his impact on the latest authoritarian actions

of Putin and Xi. Most of Trump's policies and presidential actions, such as his unilateral decision to withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement on June 1 2017, his refusal to reaffirm America's commitment to NATO Article 5, etc, do not only put the grand strategy of his administration at the center of many foreign policy debates, but offered Putin and Xi, and other authoritarians the leverage to extend their autocratic objectives, complicating democracy operations for the liberal international order (Patrick, 2019). Frum (2017) argued that in 2016, a Trump 'America First' administration appeared to promise the defense of US values in a changing world order, however, it managed to increase autocrats and global democracy challenges.

When Trump stood at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, on Wednesday, April 27, 2016 to deliver a foreign policy speech, 'America First will be the heart and overriding focus of my administration' was the center of his foreign policy speech. (Trump Election Campaign Speech, April 27 2016). Based on his election campaign speech, he was excellent at suggesting that charting America's path forward required a look back at how in the 1940s America saved the world, beating the Nazis and the Japanese Imperialists. He also unfolded the memory in which the Western front won the Cold War, saving the world once again, this time from totalitarian Communism. When he mentioned how Democrats and Republicans synergistically worked together to achieve Reagan's "tear down this wall" against Gorbachev, there was the feeling that Trump was at least going to find a place within his 'America First' foreign policy to somehow deter the increasing authoritarianism of the tough guys around the world during his own dispensation like Reagan. There was however an instant counter feeling when he argued along the line that the United States did not need any "nation-building business" and suggested instead that Washington would work with any regimes so far as American interests are advanced side by side with 'world stability.' ((Trump Election Campaign Speech, April 27 2016)). Elaborating on his 'America First' foreign policy approach, Trump insisted on the 'replacement of randomness with purpose, ideology with strategy and chaos with peace.' However, the 'America First' foreign policy adopted by Trump failed to deliver on US traditional democracy-centered foreign policy, home and abroad (McTague, 2020)

Trump and his administration delivered the harshest criticism of the media, the judiciary, congressional lawmakers, and even members of his own administration than any US president in history. (Applebaum, 2016). His natural and political coddling of dictators like Putin, Xi, and others served in the exacerbation of attacks on democratic norms around the globe. Many scholars and pundits constantly warned against Putin's advances toward becoming a life president under the Trump presidency. According to Berman (2018), 'Trump oversaw a permissive environment for Putin dictators by not forcefully speaking out against democratic backsliding and growing authoritarianism in places like Russia and China. Putin is famous for brushing aside the media and suspicious deaths of journalists and those who stand for democracy and democratization, and the rise of Trump on anti-media affairs eased up Putin's regime burden. (Ognianova, 2020) a program coordinator with the Committee to Protect Journalists, at the time. Ognianova (2020) asserted that 'Media authorities on regional and federal levels considered Borodin's attack as Putin engineered and Trump-allowed'. Trump's statement directed to Putin: 'This media problem is not in Russia because you handle it perfectly' (Trump, G-20 Meeting, November 21 2020) represents only one of the innumerable times that Trump publicly provided credence to Putin's repression and autocracy. (Bergmann, Lamond, & Dessel, 2020).

'I had an extensive conversation with Putin, and it is fair to say the Witch Hunting for getting along well with Putin and Xi China is a bad thing. (Trump, July 2 2019 Press Conference covered by CNN). 'It is amazing how numerous individuals at the top ends of intelligence loved and applauded my press conference performance in Helsinki. Putin and I had a really good discussion on significant subjects that bothered many haters who had prepared and wished to watch a boxing match between us. (Trump, July 2 2019 Press Conference). Trump's admiration for, appraisal of authoritarian rulers and their autocratic strategies was a clear return on Putin's investment. A critical assessment of Trump's aggression towards traditional US allies such as the UK, France, Australia, and Germany provides abundant insight into how the Trump administration boosted Putin's latest authoritarian actions. (Tisdall, 2017)

Furthermore, Trump withdrew the U.S from the 2016 Paris Accord, 2015 Iranian Deal, threatened to withdraw U.S funding of WHO, asked for the scrapping of the International Court of Justice, etc. (Zakaria, 2017). The Trump administration (January 20 2017- January 20 2021),

softened US traditional adversarial position against Russia. (US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for US National Security' January 10 2018). The US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in same report also noted that Putin had a goal of destabilizing the US from within.

A major Freedom Houses report on the health of global democracy has been bemoaning its backslide for 14 years in a row. (Repucci, Freedom in the World, 2021). While formal president Trump is certainly not the originator of this trend, he is certainly a key part of this story since the dawn of his administration in 2017. Although, the notable political figures often considered as one of the worst offenders of democracy are Putin and Xi, Trump easily rose close to that rank just under a single term. (Repucci, Freedom in the World, 2022). In its survey assessing 195 countries and 15 territories, in 2020 during the close of the Trump administration, the Freedom House was conclusive that political freedoms and civil liberties across the world are declining more often than they are improving. In its report of 2020 titled 'A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy', there was a clear focus on the Trump administration's assault on electoral and judicial independence in the United States with global impacts and consequences. Sarah Repucci in the opening sentence of the reports emphasized that 'Democracy and pluralism are under assault as dictators are working hard to delete the last vestiges of domestic democratic hope while spreading their authoritarian influence to the outside corners of the world'. After his impeachment trial in which he was acquitted, he entered even a more audacious phase of anti-democratic gesture and pressure, especially on the press and critics. The Trump campaign even sued the *Times*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN, for libel (Bassin, 2021). The author also noted that of relative note was 'the decline in fair treatment of refugees and asylum seekers' under his administration run on the 'America First' foreign policy framework — something that was democratically worrisome, considering the traditional position and role of the United States as a beacon of hope for greener pasture and safety seekers.

Freedom House is a Washington-based think tank, formed in 1941, with a mission to counter isolationism in America and fascism on the global scale, (Zerndt, 2016). This makes it easier to understand why its coverage of the Trump 'isolationist' administration is key in this study. The Freedom House over the years has studied a broad spectrum of threats to democracy, freedom,

rule of law, rights and liberties, from McCarthyism to Soviet oppression. (Wertheim, 2015). Since 1973, it has been publishing the Freedom in the World- an annual country-by-country report on democracy that has been called the ‘Michelin Guide to democracy’s development.’ (Osnos, 2022). Osnos (2022) in his ‘Why Democracy is on the Decline in the United States’, wrote that the Freedom House reports do not only show that democracy declined in the United States under the Trump administration, but also pointed at attacks on the institutions of democracy as accounting for the reasons.

The 2020 and 2021 publications written by Sarah Repucci reported the fourteenth consecutive years of deteriorating freedom, rule of law, rights and liberties around the world; sixty-four countries lost liberties in the past year, while only thirty-seven registered improvements. India as the world’s largest democracy witnessed some of the most alarming declines. Together with the United State as the second largest democracy in the world, the assessment of democracy in both countries gives room for alarm. (Freedom in the World, 2021). In 2009, the United States had a score of 94/100- nearing the top of the rank, just behind Germany, Switzerland, and Estonia respectively. Ten years later, with the Trump administration by this time, accounting for 2 of this 10 years, democracy slipped eight points; ranking behind ‘even’ Greece, Slovakia, and Mauritius. In the assessment of the United States, Freedom House analysts point to the types of trends that they only use in the designation of fragile parts of the world: ‘pressure on electoral institution and personnel, fierce rhetorical attacks on the press, judiciary, and on the rule of law’ (Abramowitz & Repucci, Freedom House, 2018). These attacks and others were seen against the pillars of democracy in America, specifically from the president himself. (Jeremi, 2017).

Based on this analysis, the study maintains that the Trump administration is a big victory for authoritarians such as Putin and Xi, and plays a very significant role on their latest authoritarian actions.

1.2 Structure and Central Arguments

The introductory chapter additionally outlines the structure and central arguments of the study. The study argues that: 1) the Trump foreign policy centered on an isolationist grand strategy to U.S role in global politics; 2) the Trump administration is a huge gain for authoritarians like Putin and Xi, and a huge loss for democracy; 3) a decline of democracy in the U.S is likely to lead to global decline if a certain U.S administration does not prioritize democracy promotion. The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One is the introductory part, and it addresses the background of the study. It further highlights the focus, central arguments, and organization of the research.

Chapter Two covers the literature review. It reviews a massive body of landmark literature on democracy promotion. Since efforts toward democracy promotion exist in a larger international context, discussion of comparative literature on democracy promotion and the Trump 'America First' foreign policy provides theoretical backgrounds for understanding the core driving force as well as the democratic pitfalls of the Trump administration. On the basis of the reviewed literature, chapter two also identifies and defines the central concepts engaged in the research.

Chapter Three continues the narrative of the previous chapters with liberal internationalism and U.S foreign policy of democracy promotion. It makes an academic discussion on the role of US foreign policy in external democracy promotion. Chapter three concludes with the conceptualization of the Trump 'America First' foreign policy.

Chapter Four addresses the impact of Trump's relations with Putin and Xi on democracy and democratization. It presents an academic discussion on the state of democracy and democratization during the era of Trump, Putin and Xi, with a detailed academic account of the state of democratic institutions at the time. It also outlines and analyzes Trump's executive orders, policies and presidential actions that favor the authoritarian objectives of Putin and Xi. It concludes with an examination of the most recent challenge of democracy vis-a-vis the February 24 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Putin-led Russia, and the position of Donald Trump on the Putin-led assault.

Chapter Five is the conclusion. It integrates and synthesizes all the issues and academic puzzles raised in the research.

This research will contribute significantly to contemporary debate within the field of international relations on the relevance and validity of international factors in modifying domestic political structures and behavior in line with western programming. Building on Joseph Schumpeter (1942), Robert Dahl (1971, 1989), Joseph Gourevitch (1978), Huntington (1991), Schmitter (1996), Pinkney (1997), Joseph, (1999b), Levitsky and Way (2002), Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan (1996), and Pevehouse, (2005), this research makes important academic contributions to the debates on democracy, and the role, relevance and validity of international factors within the context of political configuration and ideology.

Furthermore, the result of findings will be significant to state and non-state actors of democracy promotion, as well as future researchers of the subject. The research proposes a new context of analysis for the study of the effectiveness of the current models of democracy promotion, from the context of the Trump administration and its democratic failure. From this background, the research will add theoretical value to the analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses of actors of democracy promotion, as well as their models.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 SCHOLARLY DEBATE ON DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND ‘AMERICA FIRST’ FOREIGN POLICY

Introduction

This chapter covers the literature review segment of the study. It reviews a massive body of landmark literature on democracy promotion. Overall, the chapter addresses the following key questions: What is democracy promotion? What is the place and role of U.S foreign policy in democracy promotion? How does the U.S exert its foreign policy influence to promote democracy? How does the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy shift from U.S historic tradition of democracy promotion? And, how does this shift profits the authoritarian objectives and strategies of Vladimir Putin and Jinping Xi?

According to Larry Diamond (1995, 2008), international players within the framework of liberal internationalism provide assistance of various kinds and levels in external democracy promotion process. Such assistance are either financial or technical, but with politically targeted goals directed towards the formulation or advancement of existing democratic institutions, practices, and capacities. He argues that political assistance involves assistance in forming, or developing political institutions, governments, political parties; election assistance, and assistance towards civil society advancement. Diamond also argues that economic assistance makes a huge impact, on the presumption that economic development ultimately encourages democracy and democratization process. He finalizes that economic improvement is relevant to the legitimization and sustenance of a new democracy.

Diamond in his ‘The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State’ (2008:41), notes that a key aid instrument at the disposal of states is fundamentally on the conditionality system. This implies that desired forms of aid is received with the acceptance of

political liberalization or democracy. As Diamond argues, States may also employ persuasion or threat tactics on regimes through diplomatic pressure and sanctions in circumstances where economic aid instrument fails. On the limitations of democratic aid programs, Diamond refers to lack of coordination, coherent and consistent structures tied to the needs and uniqueness of countries as the basic issue. For the effectiveness of democracy promotion efforts and its related aid programs, Diamond argues that external democracy promotion cannot be successful where international actors fail to coordinate their aid programs in manners that are coherent and consistent with specific country case scenarios (Diamond, 2008:36).

Thomas Carothers (1999, 2004, 2009), in what he describes as a "*universal democracy template*" (1999: 88) makes significant examination of democracy promotion. He examines democracy aid programs in areas related to decentralization, civil society, rule of law, elections, political parties, governmental reforms, labor unions, independent media, and other elements of policy and governance. Carothers contrasts what he considers a 'political democracy promotion' with a 'developmental' approach, and assumes that it: 'the whole notion of democracy aid programs rests on a broader notion of democracy. For Carothers, that broader notion encompasses interest in equality and justice and the overall concept of democratization as a slow, iterative process of change in a set of political and socioeconomic structures, leading to developments in democratic terms.

Democracy aid programs therefore emphasizes democratic governance through the building of well-functioning states. (2009:5). To this background, Carothers adds that the developmental approach to external democracy promotion is associated far more with European democracy promotion organizations. Carothers (1999, 2000), much like Diamond, assumes that through democracy aid programs which could also be referred to as democratization strategies, or what he technically calls "*universal democracy template*", are globally applied regardless of local uniqueness and variations. In this case, democratic norms and institutions are directly exported without country specific theoretical logic or analysis. Carothers throws massive criticisms against the operations of such programs and argues that democracy assistance can make important contributions at the margins of democracy building, however that such programs and projects should take into consideration the uniqueness and variations of target countries.

Levitsky & Way (2002, 2010) on the other side of the analysis point to five distinct mechanisms of democratic influence asserted on the international stage by external actors: (1) *diffusion*, or what Whitehead (1996b: 5) calls the 'relatively neutral transmissions of information' across borders, or other words, the modelling on successful democracies. (2) *direct democracy promotion* undertaken by Western powers through diplomatic persuasion, pressure, threats, or even military force. (3) *multilateral conditionality*, through which external assistance or membership in international organizations is systematically tied to the democratic or human rights performance of states. (4) external *democracy assistance*, which is connected to the funding of civic education programs, reforms of legislature, judiciary, independent media, and civic organizations. (5) *transnational advocacy networks* which apply to international response to electoral fraud, human rights violations, and other violations of international norms.

Levitsky & Way (2010) classifies the post-Cold War global stage into two dimensions: *Western leverage* and *Western linkage*, which refer to a set of defining factors. In short, *Western leverage* refers to a state's vulnerability or susceptibility to external democratizing pressures, threats or persuasions. These factors include the following: (1) the regimes' bargaining power in relation to the West, or the regime's capacity to avoid Western program targeting political liberalization, and (2) the potential economic, security, or other impact of Western program on target countries. *Western linkage* on the other hand refers to the economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational ties and cross-border flows of capital, information and other services between target states and actors of democracy promotion such as the U.S., the EU, and Western-dominated multilateral institutions and organizations.

According to Levitsky & Way (2010) make the argument that the democratizing impact that Western leverage has, varies with the level of linkage. In the absence of linkage, the impact of leverage is relatively limited and too inconsistent to make significant contribution to democratization process. However, where linkage is relatively high, a more rigorous monitoring, more systematic sanctioning, and greater domestic pressure for democracy and democratization increase the cost of authoritarianism. This makes the sustenance of authoritarian rule more difficult. Under this context, external pressure is usually highly effective in pulling down

authoritarian structures. In any case, Levitsky & Way argues that transitions in high linkage case scenarios are more likely to result in stable democratization.

2.2 Limitations in External Democracy Promotion

Milestone scholars in democracy promotion frequently agree that political-economic assistance in form of conditionality, diplomatic pressure and transnational advocacy as well as linkage, in this case, -socialization with the West, as key democracy promotion instruments used by international actors promoting democracy on the global scale. (Carothers, 2008). However, the key shortcomings in democracy promotion and the aforementioned aid programs is connected to the inefficiency of an approach that hardly sufficiently puts the needs and nature of target countries into real domestic context. Democracy promotion program therefore require the development of a more coherent and consistent structure that recognizes and respects the nature and needs of target countries.

Within the doctrine of democracy promotion, Western democracy promotion organizations share the neo-liberal institutionalist conceptualization of political change. This implies top-down reforms in the political system and institution, particularly the constitution and electoral code. The essence is to produce substantial changes in the underlying political culture. Within this framework, it is state function to deliver democracy by implementing and enforcing related institutional reforms. According to Doherty (2011) and Carothers (2006), state autonomy has been checked by a pluralistic institutional structure, widened to incorporate political parties alongside civil society. The goal according to many democracy promoters, is to convince intransigent incumbents of the necessity for and benefits of reforms. The cost of reforms are usually high with economic, political and even security burden.

Carothers (2009:5) associates the incorporation of political parties and civil society as a strategy of 'political democracy promotion' and governmental organizations to key Western democracy promotion apparatus. He assumes that state power or institutional capacity is a state's ability to enact and execute policies; to carry out state processes with relative efficiency; to eliminate bribery and corruption; to ensure transparency and accountability in governmental

institutions and transactions; and to enforce laws with transparency and justice. Carothers (2009) measures democracy based on the characteristics that are intrinsic to state-building process, such as institutions of democracy guaranteeing free, fair and contested elections, providing access to accurate information, allowing political plurality, and checks and balance through legitimate separation of powers. State-building and democracy promotion are therefore considerably interrelated.

2.3 Definition of Concepts

The key concepts that serve as the building blocks to this study are; democracy and democracy promotion, and America First foreign policy. In order to transpose these concepts into measurable variables, it is relevant to operationalize them. Operationalization is simply the identification of the attributes and constituents of concepts under study. The identification of attributes and constituents is a critical task because it involves the specification of the meaning of the concept, and it is meaning of the concepts that forms the epicenter around which all potential decisions regarding theory, data collection and analysis are made. Accordingly, the constitutive attributes of the concepts under investigation will be thoroughly defined, otherwise the lack of conceptual details render the study of little analytical basis. (Giangreco, 2012).

A concept to begin with, stands as a symbolic or technical language of a study (Blaikie, 2000: 133). The technicality referred to in a concept can make a research and its process ambiguous and uncertain. To save a research from such ambiguity, the technical languages of the constituting concepts are necessarily converted into simpler and clearer empirical languages (ibid). In applying this, first I convert the concepts of '*America First*', *democracy*, *democratization*, and *authoritarian actions* into variables and then apply operationalization of the resulting variables. Operationalization involves the explanation of the abstract ideas behind concepts, representing them in the real world, showing not just how they are to be measured, but also measuring them (Blaikie, 2000:133; Bryman, 2001: 66). In order to carry out the measurement, the variables or indicators that stand for

them are first identified. Through this process, variables that are not quantifiable but rather require qualitative measurement, or interpretations in other words are more easily identified. (Bryman, 2001: 66).

Democracy and democracy promotion is the key concept applied in this study. Hence, it is imperative to review relevant literature for the purpose of organizing analysis around the definition of the term. There have been extensive efforts to conceptualize the idea of democracy and democratization. In the process, the concept has arrived at different implications across literature as and nations. By implication, the concept has often been defined in relation to specific contexts. Therefore, the body of scholarship has not arrived at a universal consensus in terms of the definition of democracy. It is therefore essential to discuss the fundamental parameters of democracy in order to determine the democratizing impact of the Trump 'America First' foreign policy on it. I will first of all present the review of the works of several landmark authors that bother on democracy, and then, drawing on this review, I will then take a personal path on the conceptualization process.

In defining democracy, Carothers (1994), in his work '*Democracy and Human Rights*' defined democracy as the reign of human rights in terms of freedom of expression, free association, freedom of movement, and equality. Building on his definition of democracy, Carothers defined democracy promotion as the promotion of human rights abroad based on the assumption that freedom of expression, free association, freedom of movement, and rule of law have the capacity to provide political and economic stability, peace and satisfaction.

Joseph Schumpeter is one of the scholars in the area of democracy best known for advocating a procedural definition of democracy which is relevant for this discourse. In his "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy" (1942:269), Schumpeter has challenged what many scholars consider the "classical doctrine" of democracy- the idea that democracy represents a process through which electorates identify and specify the common good, and politicians execute them for common good. Schumpeter repudiate this idea of democracy and argues instead that democracy is not the rule by the people, but rather the rule by politicians, who are always free in their competition for the people's vote. According to him, the "democratic method," "is the institutional construction for arriving at political decisions in which people acquire authority and power to make decisions via competitive

struggle over people's vote" (ibid: 269). Schumpeter agrees with other scholars that free and fair elections requirements for democracy and democratization, but disagree that free and fair elections are sufficient condition for democracy since the free will of the people may in fact be hugely manipulated by politicians, who control vital spheres. Schumpeter argues that such a condition makes a certain kind of 'rule by the people' concept unlikely and even undesirable.

Schumpeter, influenced largely by Max Weber, instead puts forward a minimalist model of democracy which defines the concept of democracy in relations to competition between political leaders. This minimalist model of Schumpeter acknowledges that the general public gives legitimization of government based on the level of competitiveness in elections which must be accountable. Notwithstanding, the people's participation in the main policy making of government is relatively very limited. Established policies are primarily derived from the decision making of government actors. Therefore, Schumpeter's definition of democracy is fundamentally based on the importance of multiplicity of political actors together with free and fair elections upon which powers are obtained. (Schumpeter, 1942)

Similar to Schumpeter is Robert Dahl. In his book "Democracy and Its Critics" (1989), Dahl argues that there exists in reality no modern country that meets the ideal of democracy, making ideal democracy a theoretical utopia. To achieve the ideal form of democracy, Dahl puts forward some major criteria involving effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda, and inclusiveness, which according to him is the legitimate stake within the political process. Dahl instead uses the designation "polyarchies" to describe politically advanced countries attaining the highest level of democracy (Dahl, Polyarchy, 1971). In his "Polyarchy, 1971" Dahl provides a "procedural minimal" outlining necessary conditions for modern political democracy, or what he designates as "polyarchy". The conditions are: control over government decisions regarding policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials, elected officials are chosen frequently through elections, rights of all adults to vote in election; rights of all adults to contest for elective posts in government; rights of citizens to express themselves on political issues, rights of citizens to alternative sources of information, and rights of citizens to independent associations and organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups. Based on the broad criteria discussed above, Dahl, much like Schumpeter, defines democracy as a system of

government in which political power is attained via free, fair and contested elections, and in which there is multiplicity of political actors enjoying vested powers. (Dahl, 1989).

In addition to Dahl's criteria for democracy, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan in "Toward Consolidated Democracies," published in the *Journal of Democracy* in April 1996, assert that "free and contested elections on the basis of expansive inclusiveness and voter eligibility is necessary but by no means sufficient to meet the seven institutional requirements for democracy in Dahl's polyarchy (Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan, 1996:3). Both scholars argue that even such elections with expansive inclusiveness and voter eligibility are not sufficient to complete a democratic transition, unless political actors govern democratically through the rule of state laws. They posit that in many cases in which free and contested elections have been realized, "the resulting government still lack the de jure and facto power related to the determination of policy in many important areas of government "due to the fact that even executive, legislative, and judicial powers are still decisively constrained by some interwoven set of reserve domains such as authoritarian enclaves or military prerogatives. They both argue under this background that a political regime cannot be considered a democracy except its political leadership govern in a democratic way. The authors' argument is that "If freely elected political actors like the executive, act contrarily to the constitution, in terms of the violation of human rights, and encroaching upon the constitutively legitimate functions of the legislature, their regimes cannot be considered as democracies in any way." (pg. 1)

Samuel Huntington (1991, 1993) agrees with views of Schumpeter, Dahl, Linz, Stepan, and other scholars that free and fair elections are required for democracy, but like others, he asserts that defining democracy merely in relations to elections is a minimal approach. He argues that "Governments chosen by elections may still be inefficient in adopting policies demanded for public good out of special interest, corruption, short-sightedness, and irresponsibility (Huntington, 1993:10). For a real democracy, Dahl argues that free, fair and contested elections is required to be strengthened by the combination of political pluralism and the system of checks and balances.

After a thorough review of the scholarship on democracy, the study departs from a completely political conceptualization of democracy that asserts competition which is associated with political plurality in government; participation, which implies the participation of citizens in

politics (free and fair elections and policy making); alternative information source, which emphasizes the relevance and the role of independent media; and, finally, a political system of checks and balances which entails de facto and de jure power division among existing state institutions.

Conclusion

This chapter which focused on scholarly arguments on external democracy promotion has answered the following key questions: What is democracy promotion ? What is the driving force of external democracy promotion? What are the means through which democracy is externally promoted? What are the limitations of international democracy support? And, what are the factors that can improve democratization programs?

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 LIBERAL INTERNATIONALISM AND US FOREIGN POLICY OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Introduction

This chapter continues the narrative of the previous chapters with liberal internationalism as the theoretical lens of the study on the role of U.S foreign policy in external democracy promotion in the bid to understand the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy based administration. The section answers the following key questions underpinning the current academic debate on Trump’s ‘America First’ foreign policy: How do we conceptualize Trump’s ‘America First’ foreign policy? What are the actual executive orders, policies and instruments applied by the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy? How do these executive orders, policies and instruments shift from the fundamental principles of liberal internationalism and U.S traditional foreign policy strategies and objectives? What has the impact of the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy been on the liberal international order and democracy promotion? Why has the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy had this level of impact?

Liberal internationalism emerged during the nineteenth century through Lord Palmerston who was a British Foreign Secretary, and later on, a Prime Minister. (Taylor, 1994). The theory of liberal internationalism was later developed into Wilsonianism during the second decade of the 20th century through the instrumentality of Woodrow Wilson who was United States president and believed so much in liberal democracy and its spread across the world. (Jahn, 2018). Scholars such as John Ikenberry and Daniel Deudney have equally attributed liberal internationalism to Franklin Roosevelt’s foreign policy ideologies, typical of other subsequent US presidents, as inherited from Woodrow Wilson. (Ikenberry, 2018). Liberal internationalism interchangeably called Pan-Liberalism and International Liberalism is a doctrine of foreign policy with two basic arguments in support of liberal democracy and its promotion through state and non-state actors: the first argument

of liberal internationalism is that international organizations have the capacity to achieve multilateral agreements between states that promote liberal democracy, and should do so accordingly. The second basic argument of liberal internationalism is that liberal states have the capacity to intervene in external states in pursuant of liberal objectives, and should accordingly do so. Military intervention and humanitarian aids for the promotion of liberal values constitute such kind of interventions. (Jahn, 2018).

In summary, the liberal internationalism and Wilsonianism are characterized by the common principles of spread of democracy, self-determination, spread of capitalism, support for collective security, support for open diplomacy, support for multilateralism, support for navigation and sea freedom, opposition to American isolationism, and opposition to secret treaties.

3.2 The Role of U.S Foreign Policy in External Democracy Promotion

The promotion of democracy is one of the four main objectives of U.S foreign policy. The remaining three objectives of the U.S foreign policy are the protection of the United States, and its citizens and allies, the preservation of balance of power, and the expansion of capital mobility. (Dimitrova, 2017). U.S external democratic impact is exerted through normative interaction, such as sharing and promoting the U.S norms, rules and standards like democracy, human rights and good governance, through democracy promotion aids and institutionalistic approaches (Ikenberry, 2011). This is much similar to the EU's democracy assistance through growing EU financial assistance as well as political cooperation such as Association Agreement, and Free Trade Agreement which are determined by political and economic conditionality aimed at creating incentive-centered diplomacy between the EU and targeted non-member state (Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier, et al, 2004 : 4).

Democracy promotion as an objective of U.S foreign policy started in the early and mid-1980s with former President Reagan's Cold War Foreign Policy. The policy framework involved

the creation of National Endowment for Democracy (NED)- the economic dimension of the democracy promotion policy. NED was formed in 1984 as a private organisation committed to external democracy promotion. It was funded by President Reagan's strategic Cold War policy, receiving \$18 million annual budget to fight the 'war of ideas' with the Soviet Union. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) as a democracy promotion therefore became one of the first U.S foreign policy instrument and program for external democracy promotion. (Rose, 2001).

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) subsequently eclipsed in NED as U.S foreign policy instrument and program for external democracy promotion. USAID became the game changer as it diminished the scope and effectiveness of NED. Chile, Paraguay, Haiti, South Korea, Philippines, Pakistan etc are few of the beneficiaries of U.S democracy promotion strategies and funding in the second half of the 1980s. Since then, many countries across all the continents have been impacted directly or indirectly with the multiplication and rise of other actors of democracy promotion like the European Union, and other international organizations. Illiberal regional powers like Russia and China often conceive democracy promotion as anti-communist end, and have often strategically developed authoritarian laws, principles and practices to limit democracy promotion internally and externally. (Gideon, 2000).

According to Wendt (1999) and Hopf (1998:171-200), actors of democracy promotion like the U.S are social structures with identities to promote, and interests to realize through this process. Both authors argue that those identities and interests are subjective qualities seeking universality as deeply rooted in the actor's subjective knowledge. However, the meaning of those self-understanding are grounded on how the target states understand and express their preferred identities and existence in light of the norms and values of democracy. Consequently, as Kratochwil & Ruggie, (1986) argue, the meaning of identities and interest of state actors of democracy promotion like the US becomes inter- subjective and must be viewed under a wider lens for a possibility of a meeting point. Wendt, (1999) argue that the meanings of the identities to be shared, and interest to be realized are socially created "knowledge", that if shared or as

Sedelmeir, (2004) directly puts it, ‘distributed’, there is the likelihood of subsequent effects, such as the construction or even the realization of ‘collective identity’ in favor of the promoter’s objectives (Sedelmeir, 2004).

Alongside Wendt, authors such as Checkel (1999:545-560) and Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeir (2004: 661-679) understand the concept of ‘distribution of knowledge’ (democracy and democratisation process in this case), as a process of ‘social learning’ through which the norms and values of democracy, rule of law, human rights, and liberty are passed from democracies to non-democracies. The authors above argue that social learning revolves around a process where actors of democracy promotion utilize economic and political interaction within broader institutional contexts such as norms, values and institutional structures, to exert their identities, interests and preferences. In agreement with March & Olsen, (1989), Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeir argue that social learning models assumes the ‘logic of appropriateness’ which must be subjected not only to the concepts of legitimacy and identity, but also resonance. Based on this ‘logic of appropriateness,’ the actors of democracy promotion are motivated by identities, values, and norms. In this case, ‘rhetorical action’ are adopted to integrate the process of social interaction in their operational framework. Consequently, Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeir make the assumption that the likelihood of the compliance of actors of democracy promotion to these norms and values increases when actors’ are motivated by the appropriateness of the same values and norms.

U.S foreign policy has concentrated much focus on democracy promotion using different programmes and instruments. This is partly because of the rising authoritarian objectives and strategies of modern authoritarians like Vladimir Putin and Jinping Xi. Democracy promotion is therefore no longer regarded as the only game in town (Levitsky & Ahmad, 2021). However, the U.S as a major power in contemporary international political system, seeking to globalize democracy, human rights, rule of law and liberty (Carothers, 1997), has been influencing global politics along democracy line with both soft power and hard power. While there are other states and non state actors promoting democracy today, none of the aforementioned currently matches the scale of the U.S when we consider the size of their economic and political spendings on target

countries and regions (Allison & Beschel, 1992).

As the U.S seeks to externalize the constitutive values of democracy, all of its instruments and models of democracy promotion tied one form of aid program or the other that involved directly or indirectly, the role of civil society. Until the late 2000s, the U.S alone was mainly concerned with global active civil society (Wolf-Wurm, 2011). The European Union created the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) in 2013 as an independent, grant-making organisation to ensure that the EU converge with the U.S to engage active civil society toward democracy promotion and assistance. The formation, constitution and empowerment of the EED was the EU's strategy to engage active civil society in a way that brings adjustments to its traditional democratic script while increasing its leadership position within the actors of democracy promotion. The establishment of the EED subsequently paved the way for the creation and activation of the Civil Society Forum. One of the immediate impacts of the EED and the Civil Society Forum is the systematic coordination of democracy promotion engagements between the U.S and the EU. Before the EED and the Civil Society Forum, there was no institutionalized coordination and cooperation mechanism between the US and the EU to save crisis situations in target countries. (Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier, et al, 2004: 4).

Although the democratization achievements through U.S its myriads of models and programmes are comprehensively convincing, the general impact of U.S in terms of democracy promotion and the leadership within actors of democracy promotion have increased the confrontations of authoritarians. (Freyburg & Richter, 2020). The time of EED establishment coincided with the presidential second term of Barack Obama who expanded chances for new policies, strategies and convergence between the U.S and the EU. This development however prompted the starting point of renewed special interest on the activities of democracy promoters by current autocrats under Putin's leadership (Chen & Kinzelbach, 2015).

The cooperation of U.S and EU along NATO and EU lines, and NATO and EU enlargement in Eastern Europe has been cited by Putin as one of his points of disagreement with U.S, NATO and EU. Upon Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Putin's requests as conditions for ceasefire and settlement is a constitutional assurance of Ukraine that it would not join NATO

or the EU in future. The Communist Party of China remains unconcerned about democratization externally, depending on its own external interest, but continues to hold on Hong Kong and its Taiwan unification agenda firmly, while cautioning the U.S on its Asian interests (Chen & Kinzelbach, 2015). (Hackenesch, 2018) argued that while China's rising economic cooperation with African countries has the potentials to minimize democracy promotion effects of the West. This counteraction move by Putin and Xi has however expanded the gaze of U.S and the EU in their respective regions (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015). While the renewed focus and effort of U.S foreign policy has been yeilding democratic returns, Börzel & Risse (2003) argue through some theoretical and policy implications, that the U.S in its renewed strategy may inadvertently strengthen autocracy, especially as Russia's invasion of Ukraine unfolds, same way as Putin may unintentionally strengthen liberalism through his attacks on neighbors.

According to Mitchell (2006), democracy promotion of the US in early 2012 faced severe setback when about nineteen workers of U.S. democracy assistance organizations, also including the Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), as well as the International Republican Institute (IRI), were arrested by the post-Mubarak military regime in Egypt where nothing much in terms of democracy has been achieved. Several months before those arrests, there were many semi-authoritarian regimes beginning with Bishkek to Tunis which collapsed. The collapse of those semi-authoritarian powers occurred without the official democracy assistance community. The Color Revolutions were also peaceful uprisings that occasioned the collapse of corrupt regimes like Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan in 2005.

On the the impact of rising powers on the future prospects of democracy promotion, (Carothers, 2007) argues that the U.S is in danger of seeing rising powers like Brazil and India reaching low level of contributions to democracy promotion on the global stage over rising concerns for domestic democracy. This is especially the case of Brazil. There is therefore the growing concerns over these rising powers' contributions for democracy promotion. One of those reasons is their over -concentration on their domestic economic and political affairs. With Russia and China increasing their military and economic influence across their region and beyond, the task of democracy promotion will outweigh U.S if rising powers like India and Brazil are not prepared enough to fit into the shoes of U.S. However, while the author might be right, he seems to forget to recognize, or rather simply choses to neglect the role of other state and non-state actors

of democracy promotion like the EU and other international organizations like the United Nations' agencies for democracy promotion and civil society groups. Such magnitude of overgeneralization- 'US being the only actor of democracy promotion' is apparently one of his usual oversights. Again, the U.S has maintained a prolonged solid ground and result of its democracy promotion agenda that provides prospects in abundance. (Ikenberry, 2018). This is basically important if we consider the trajectory of the U.S democracy promotion efforts.

The U.S foreign policy of democracy promotion therefore has been studied within the theoretical and conceptual lens provided by this body of literature. This include the models of democracy promotion, the objectives, the interests, as well as the limitations. Davis (2007) argue that democratisation process under U.S traditional foreign policy of democracy promotion has been hugely successful across Europe, America, Africa, albeit a relatively weaker achievements in the Middle East. However, as Hass (2020) assume, Putin has benefitted more than any external political individual, and Russia as a state, from the shift in U.S traditional foreign policy of democracy promotion under the Trump administration, as Trump became increasingly anti- establishment, anti-globalism and isolationistic.

3.3 Conceptualizing the Trump ‘America First’ Foreign Policy

The core aim of this segment is to unpack and explain what ‘America First’ means in the Trump foreign policy, the objective of the concept, features of the policy, as well as what informs the policy vision. Conceptually, the questions arise: what is ‘America First’ foreign policy? And how should we conceptualize it? How does the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy drifts from U.S historic tradition of democracy promotion? What are the impacts of the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy on the latest authoritarian actions of Putin and Xi?

Conceptualizing the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy has been one key focus and problem of foreign policy scholars and analysts for half a decade. Unlike those of Monroe, Roosevelt, Truman, Carter, Reagan, and Bush, Trump’s ‘America First’ foreign policy suffers ‘brilliant incoherence’ (Sestanovich, 2017). One of the identifiable issues of the Trump foreign policy stems from the fact that it represents, as Fareed Zakaria (2017:52) argues, *‘the most radical departure from a bipartisan American foreign policy since 1945’*, constituting therefore *‘a heavy challenge to the liberal order, because it comes with a causal disrespect for the values of liberal democracy itself.’* He further highlights the potentials of the Trump administration to pave the way for *‘the collapse of the liberal world order’*, just as Applebaum (2016) argues in her *‘Is it the end of the West as we know it.’* The Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy therefore refers to the Trump neo-isolationist and zero-sum approach to global affairs, which prompted his withdrawal of the US from its traditional economic and political role on the international scene connected to the promotion of democracy. One of these was his withdrawal of the US from the 2016 Paris Agreement on June 1 2017 soon after his inauguration on January 20, 2017. Regional powers like China and Russia easily stepped up their political and economic pace to fill the leadership vacuum while Trump’s brinkmanship was notably on what he called ‘burden sharing’.

Although U.S core foreign policy interests remain unchanged as defined by every US President since after WWII: to guarantee US national security, economic well-being, and American vision and way of life. However, the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy strategy differs significantly from the liberal grand strategies adopted by most of US past presidents, and with consequences: It is

'perceived to have done a poor job, leading to increasing challenges of democracy and democratisation process, disorder in liberal international order, disorder in the Middle East and poor global economic performance. (Cha, 2016) To defend U.S security and economic interests, Trump launched a neo-isolationist and neo-sovereigntist approach driven by his 'America First' strategy, as first declared in his *National Interest* review speech: *'America First' will be the primary and overriding focus of my administration'*. Trump therefore rejects the US traditional liberal internationalist grand strategy, calling it *'a complete and total disaster'*. He replaced it with what in template is a *'new, rational American foreign policy'* aimed at *'isolating the U.S from nation-building business abroad'*. This also implies the rejection of the policy of democracy promotion. By so doing, the Trump 'America First' foreign policy rejects and withdraws from the two main pillars of the liberal grand strategy, namely multilateralism and globalism, and instead, replacing them with 'Americanism' understood as economic and military nationalism. Trump himself declared, *'I will not hesitate to deploy military force when there is no alternative. But if America fights, it must fight to win.'* (Trump, 2017).

According to Dimitrova (2017), the Trump 'America First' foreign policy was much like the return of Jacksonian built on nativism, realism and economic nationalism. He argued that the return of the Jacksonian model in world politics has the capacity to trigger what Stewart Patrick (2017:52) calls 'hedging'. Hedging refers to a situation in which *'great powers become unpredictable in such a way that there is more global distribution of power, and such happens fast.'* Patrick warned that democracy promotion was going to suffer huge obstacle as the Trump administration abdicated its global leadership role, helping Russia, China, and even Iran to fill the vacuum, especially in the Middle East. He argued that the Trump administration shattered U.S interest in the region- including democracy promotion.

In March 2018, Trump continued his brinkmanship, withdrawing the U.S from the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal with the following reasons: *'We cannot prevent an Iranian bomb under the current agreement which is already decaying. Because of the rotten structure, I am announcing today that the United State is withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal'* (Trump, 2018). Under this context, some scholars like Patrick (2018) argue that the Trump foreign policy was not only aimed at fighting extremism and terrorism, especially as he earlier on January 27 2017, placed a travel ban on six Muslim-dominated countries, but also defined by *American Isolationism*.

However, the seeming unpredictable nature of Trump's executive orders, prompts some scholars like Bentley & David (2021), to conceptualize the Trump 'America First' foreign policy as the unpredictability doctrine. However, they cite Trump himself considering 'unpredictability as a strategic asset' in his 2016 election campaign. Yet, there is difficulty related to incorporating the concept of unpredictability into a mode of international political doctrine. In addition to Trump's assertion of unpredictability as a strategic asset in his foreign policy, the authors cite what they consider as 'inconsistency' 'inconstancy' 'unconstrainedness' and 'unreliability' in the Trump 'America First' foreign policy.

Based on Carothers' conception of democracy and democracy promotion, Patrick (2017:52) argue that the Trump 'America First' foreign policy limited democracy and democracy promotion in so many areas related to rights, freedoms and liberty. He underlined Trump's executive orders banning entry for eight Muslim countries, and his isolationist approach to global alliances linked to the promotion of democratic values like NATO and the EU.

Trump's first presidential visit was to Saudi Arabia on May 20 2017 where he signed a military arms deal worth \$350 billion for over 10 years with Saudi Arabia to contain Iran. Given that Saudi Arabia is an authoritarian state, and the brutal murder of U.S *Washington Post* Journalist, Jamal was fresh, the Trump 'America First' foreign policy has been defined along anti-democracy line by many foreign policy scholars. (Trump's Presidential visit speech to Saudi Arabia, May 20 2017).

Some scholars have argued against the doctrine of unpredictability in the definition of Trump's foreign policy, citing what they consider as Trump's 'conceptual uncertainty' to argue that his personality lacks the conceptual aptitude to formulate a distinct and coherent policy doctrine. (Fuchs 2017). Hassan & Featherstone (2021:3-4, 7, 19-20) argue that the Trump 'America First' foreign policy cannot be explained by *unpredictability doctrine* even though the president's 'low conceptual complexity administration style' made it unpredictable. However, there is an empirical gap because, while the authors' negation does not ipso facto provide the governing

style' deployed to explain his position lacks the clarity to offer any comprehensive starting point for this intellectual exchange.

Boys (2021:16) attempted a partial synthesis of Hassan & Featherstone (2021) and Bentley & David (2021) but merely ended up linking Trump's unpredictability to his erraticism. Turner & Kaarbo (2021) through the instrumentality of political psychology deployed what they termed Trump's 'impulsivity, emotion, and provocation toward China' to argue in support of the doctrine of unpredictability. Ettinger, (2019) on the other side prefers to use *principled realism* in the explanation of the foundation of Trump's foreign policy, considering deposits of 'managed' realist traits in Trump's executive orders and policies.

However, most of the conceptualizations of the Trump foreign policy as a doctrine of unpredictability, or not, or the Jacksonian code, have been developed from hypotheses devoid of significant integration of the many epistemological and conventional interpretations of what intrinsically characterize a *doctrine* and *uncertainty*, and hypotheses that provided too little or no methodological setting for empirically testing the massive dataset of Trump's manifestoes, executive orders, speeches, media interviews, press release, tweets, publications, presidential visits, phone calls etc. Those cannot be sidelined in the characterization process. Bentley & David (2021) for instance, arrived at 'inconsistency' 'inconstancy' 'unconstrainedness' and 'unreliability' to explain their position without a distinct social scientific method x-raying these key elements of the Trump foreign policy.

Conclusion

This section has answered the following key questions: how do we conceptualize Trump's 'America First' foreign policy? What are the actual executive orders, policies and instruments applied by the Trump 'America First' foreign policy? How do these executive orders, policies and instruments shift from the fundamental principles of liberal internationalism and U.S traditional

foreign policy strategies and objectives? What has the impact of the Trump 'America First' foreign policy been on the liberal international order and democracy promotion? Why has the Trump 'America First' foreign policy had this level of impact? The chapter discussed how the U.S uses its position in the liberal international order and international organisations such as World Health Organisation, World Trade Organisation, World Bank, International Court of Justice, etc., and alliances such as NATO and the EU in external democracy promotion. It discussed the shift in US foreign policy of democracy promotion under the Trump 'America First' administration, how the Trump administration favors the authoritarian objectives and strategy of Putin and Xi, and why it is valid to conclude that the Trump administration was a huge gain for authoritarians and a huge loss for the liberal international order. In doing so, it addressed the concepts of 'America First' and democracy promotion, and gradually narrowed the focus down to the anti-establishment, anti-globalism, and anti-democracy related to Trump's withdrawal, and attempted withdrawal of the U.S from key global accords, alliances and international organisations in a seemingly pro-Putin, pro-Xi objectives and strategy. The section showed that the Trump administration was anti-establishment, anti-integration and therefore strategically nationalistic (withdrawing US from the 2016 Paris Accord, the 2015 Iranian Deal; attacked the EU, NATO and the liberal international order).

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 TRUMP'S RELATIONS WITH PUTIN AND XI VIS-À-VIS HIS EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Introduction

This chapter addresses the impact of Trump's relations with Putin and Xi on democracy and democratization. It presents an academic discussion on the state of democracy and democratization during the era of Trump, Putin and Xi, with a detailed academic account of the state of democratic institutions at the time. It also outlines and analyzes Trump's executive orders, policies and presidential actions that favor the authoritarian objectives of Putin and Xi. It concludes with an examination of the most recent challenge of democracy vis-a-vis the February 24 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Putin-led Russia, and the position of Donald Trump on the Putin-led assault.

Unlike the pre-Trump era where the U.S pursued a tough policy toward Russia and Putin's autocracy, including the imposition of harsher sanctions and increasing deployment of NATO forces to the Polish border to protect Eastern Europe from falling to the Putin regime, the Trump administration was filled with pro-Putin and pro-authoritarian politicians, giving credence to Putin's regime, and inspiring him towards expanding his anti-liberal sentiments across the region. (Jeremi, 2017). For instance, U.S ambassador in Berlin announced his explicit support for right-wing movements across Eastern Europe. In a breach of tradition, the Trump-appointed ambassador Richard Grenell made the solemn declaration in an interview granted to *Breitbart News* (June 24 2018), where he solemnly asserted: 'I am absolutely behind conservatives across Europe, including right-wing pro-Russian Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz, and ready to empower them in different ways'. (Trump-appointed ambassador, Richard Grenell's interview with *Breitbart*

News, June 24 2018).

The ambassador's public support for Putin and other authoritarian regimes typified Trump's public persuasion of France to break out from the EU: 'Macron, why don't you break out from the EU?' (Trump's meeting with President Macron at G-20 meeting Saudi Arabia, November 22 2020), suggesting that the US will offer France a better trade deal. Apart from contradicting U.S stated policy, the Trump administration served Putin's interests in ways that enriched his authoritarian position and actions. His administration helped Putin to attack and soften Putin's oppositions. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel is one of many disrespected by Trump despite her global influence, not just as the leading voice in the EU, and the leader of the largest economy and most powerful state in the EU, but also as one considered to be the foremost custodian of the liberal west for years. Furthermore, Merkel and Putin have long had a contentious relationship rooted in personal distrust and opposing world views. (Forsberg, 2016).

During the Trump administration, both Germany and Canada signaled that the era of American global leadership dwindled significantly. After the May 2017 NATO summit held in Brussels, Merkel briefed a large congregation in Germany that reliance on the transatlantic relationship was no longer a possibility and positivity. (Schuman, 2020 : the state of the Transatlantic Relationship in the Trump Era, report, March 2 2020). She asserted: 'From my experience in the last few days, the times for relying fully on others are somewhat over. It is time for us, Europeans, to seriously and conscientiously to take our fate into our own hands'. (Edward Said, New York Times, June 25 2017). Canada was not let out in the Trump attack on liberal democracies. Trump imposed tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum under the same Putin's anti-liberal strategy which the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau captioned: 'a turning point in the Canada-US relations.' (Justin Trudeau, 2018). Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland equally delivered a speech thanking the US for its long stewardship of the international system right from the post-war era, implicitly suggesting it was the end of US leadership under the Trump administration. (Bromke & Nossad, 2018)

Trump reduced support for NATO and sought to free up Eastern Europe for Putin's exploitation. (Leonnig & Rucker, 2020). Trump consistently denied Putin-led Russian interference

in his election victory, however, his relations and cooperation with Putin is more diplomatically coherent and substantial than his relations and cooperation with US allies such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. (Kirton, 2020). In June 2018, Putin consistently pressured Angela Merkel and Boris Johnson to re-include Putin in the G7, following his suspension after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. (Guardian, September 17 2020). However, the duo denounced Trump's pro-Putin politics in the G7 in all occasions. In Europe, Trump's best of relations is with the undemocratic regime heads of Putin, Hungary and Poland. Among the dictators, he called Egyptian leader Abdel Fattah el Sisi 'my favorite dictator' (Trump to Clark Mindock, NYT, September, 2019), and refused to denounce Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who was indicted for the brutal murder of the Saudi Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018. In what was apparently Puntinist, the Trump administration instead silenced all prosecution move.

In March 2017, Trump declined from shaking hands with Angela Merkel during her visit to the White House. (Julian Machester, CNN, March 17 2017. (The CNN described the scenario in the following words: 'this is a tense moment between the U.S and German leaders. Trump once again bashed Merkel, citing 'policies allowing refugees into Germany' in his campaign trail.' Away from the White House, Trump again demeaned Angela Merkel in public during a 2018 G7 Summit attended by other world leaders, saying: 'Here, Angela. Don't say I never give you anything or guide you', accusing Angela Merkel of being 'a hardcore protectionist' with trade policies. (Julian Machester, CNN, March 17 2017. He later asked the US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to investigate: 'launch an investigation into whether German car companies and automobile imports are hurting US national security'. (Julian Mayeda & Jenny Leonard, Los Angeles Times, February 18 2019).

Trump made a tweet on June 18, 2018 attacking Germany in support of Putin's interest in disintegrating Europe for easy circulation of his regime principles: 'Germany has turned against its own leadership as migration is compounding the tenuous Berlin coalition woes. Crime in Germany is high up. Huge mistakes everywhere in Europe brought mostly by millions of people with unchanged violent culture!' Following immediately was a report from *The Washington Post*

Germany. Putin strongly resents the present structure of global economic order and US leading role in the international finance system. Of course, the present structure and system is of immense economic and geopolitical advantage to the US, with access to its capital markets, making economic sanctions so effective. Putin seeks to disrupt the structure and system to weaken US sanction capacity as he seeks to extend the frontiers of authoritarianism. Strategically, with Trump on the driver's seat of the international system, and eagerly pushing for an all-out trade war with Europe and Asia, Putin was busy crafting a constitutional amendment to the 1993 Russian Constitution to maintain power till 2036. (Tisdall, 2017).

According to Harris (2020), one way the Trump administration impacted on the new authoritarian tendency of Putin was Trump's imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum imports to reduce the economic strength of a united Europe. Consequently, the imposed tariffs, of the Trump administration began to rapidly escalate situations of trade war between Trump and US allies to the political comfort of Putin. With Trump publicly threatening the imposition of tariffs on European cars, the EU swiftly responded with targeted sanctions on US goods such as Harley-Davidson Inc. motorcycles, bourbon, and around 200 additional categories, including US steel, cigarettes, corn, and cosmetics. Trump lambasted the EU, calling it 'very unfair trade policy makers', and ending negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) which was schemed to remove barriers to trade between US and EU countries. While Trump engaged the EU with his economic brinkmanship, Putin was found renewing Russian trade deals with China, and some independent EU members. (Rucker and Harris, 2020).

Trump's decision to pull out of the Iranian deal which was considered by many foreign policy analysts as one of EU's greatest foreign policy accomplishments, was to widen the conditions for the imposition of sanctions on European companies doing business in or with Iran under the conditions of the Iran Nuclear agreement. Trump additionally, announced plans to pull out the U.S from the WTO, repeatedly asking for cooperation from top White House officials that with the argument that 'the WTO was put in place by the rest of the world to screw the US States'. Acting Putin's script, to return his investment, Rucker & Harris (2020) argued that Putin's goal with the Trump administration was the withdrawal of US from WTO to throw the global trading

system into disarray for Putin's advantage. A WTO withdrawal would build anti-Americanism and global distrust towards the US and stoke anti-Americanism, and increase Russia's geopolitical legitimacy. It would again create viable chances for Russia to create new and more transactional alliances with other Western nations. (Patrick, 2019).

Trump refused to endorse the joint statement issued at the end of the 2018 G7 summit in Canada. (Michael Shear, NYT, June, 9 2019). Trump tweeted: 'Based on Justin Trudeau's false statements at his news conference, about Canada charging huge tariffs to American workers, companies and farmers, our U.S Reps have been vehemently authorized against endorsing the 2018 G7 summit Communique as we make assessment of the Tariffs on automobiles flooding American market'. (Trump, Twitter, June 17 2018). Trump's refusal to sign the G7 communiqué further escalated tensions with France. Macron's presidency responded immediately with an official statement: 'international cooperation cannot depend on fits of anger or little words, backing the final G7 communiqué and promoting international norms does'. While Trump took on France, Germany, Canada, and other notable liberal states, Putin capitalized to nurture anti-Americanism in Western Europe, where the Trump administration attempted to erase unity, cooperation and democratic norms. Consequently, international confidence in the Trump administration dropped from 64% (Barack Obama's final years) to 22% just half way into Trump's four years term. Out of over 35 countries which took part in a survey by PEW research center in 2018, only Russia demonstrated higher confidence in the Trump administration. The global public express no confidence in Trump, but maintain relatively favorable opinion of the United States. (PEW survey on international confidence on Donald Trump, 2018).

In September 2018, under widespread accusation that Trump was only returning Putin's investment, Trump signed an executive order, establishing a process by which the Director of National Intelligence can investigate any form of foreign interference in U.S elections with mandatory sanctions upon discovery. (Rosenberg, 2019). Members of Congress argued that the executive order 'fell short of the means of prevention, and that legislation not executive order could force tougher actions against Putin's Moscow.' Strategically, the executive order was deliberately meant to undermine the momentum behind the Deter Act through which immediate

imposition of mandatory and severe economic sanctions on Putin and Moscow was possible, in response to Russian interference in the 2016 U.S election. One of the key sponsors of the bill, Senator Rubio Van Hollen, referred to the executive order as a version of the Deter Act ‘without the teeth’, accusing Trump of promoting Putin’s clamp down on the institutions and models of democracy promotion. (Rubio Van Hollen, Press Release on DETER Act, April 3 2019).

Trump vigorously opposed Congressional sanctions legislation on Russia, in an apparent show of solidarity to Putin. He showed great eagerness to instead lift sanctions on Russia, and put forward the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) - a bipartisan legislation that enacted multiple sanctions on Putin and Russia in response to Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S election. (U.S Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Report, January 10 2018 Putin’s Asymmetric Assault on Democracy : Implications for U.S National Security). According to Zengerrle (2019), the Trump administration consistently lobbied against the CAATSA bill. Following the passage of the CAATSA bill in both houses with overwhelming majorities, Trump immediately issued an official statement in sharp opposition to the bill, tagging it ‘a seriously flawed bill’ with lack of constitutional legitimacy. The CAATSA bill originally requiring the Treasury Department to implement additional sanctions on Russia through Russian sovereign debt, derivatives and oligarch in order to preempt future attempts of political meddling. Rather, the Trump administration reassured rather than deterred Russia, criticizing CAATSA’s sanctioning of five Russian entities and nineteen individuals in March 2018 for their interference in the 2016 US election. The April 2018 sanctions imposed on seven Russian oligarchs, twelve companies and seventeen Russian government officials by the Treasury Department was also attacked by the Trump administration with unflinching energy for the reduction of the burden on Oleg Deripaska, equally referred to as ‘Putin’s oligarch’. (Rep, Royce, Edward, 115th Congress Report on Trump, February 8 2017).

4.2 TRUMP-PUTIN RELATIONS AND IMPACT ON DEMOCRATISATION

During a meeting with Putin in Vietnam on the sidelines of the 2017 APEC conference, Trump categorically stated: ‘Many are not aware that Russia is being very heavily hit by sanctions. It is time to heal a broken world. I believe that having Russia as a friend, opposed to

frequent fighting, is an asset to our country and the world rather than a liability.’ (Dartunorro Clark, Washington Post, July 18 2018). After a 2017 meeting in Hamburg, Trump reportedly ordered his reporter to keep contents of meeting with Putin from public knowledge. There was a similar case during the 2018 G20 in Argentina in which Trump’s meeting with Putin was without a translator or note taker. Trump’s support for Putin and his admiration of his authoritarian principles was a huge boost for Putin’s regime. In a summit in Helsinki on July 16, 2018, Trump declined to affirm his loyalty to the rule of law and instead aligned himself with Putin to orchestrate unprecedented attack on liberal democracy. That singular Helsinki Summit revealed a critical concern best described by *The Washington Post* editorial board: ‘In Helsinki, Trump once again insisted ‘there was no collusion’ with Russia. Yet in refusing to acknowledge Putin’s clamp down on the rule of law and fundamental human rights, while ridiculing his own country’s justice system, Trump was apparently colluding with the leader of a hostile power to take the world back to years of authoritarianism’. (Dartunorro Clark, Washington Post, July 18 2018).

According to Rucker & Harris (2020), Putin had requested Trump to hand over American officials to the Russian government for interrogation over issues bordering on interference on Russian’s government system. Putin made the request in a Helsinki Summit, suggesting Trump would do so in exchange for allowing the special counsel to interview indicted Russians on their alleged role in the 2016 US election. Trump called Putin’s request an ‘incredible offer.’ On the side of Trump, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders initially embraced Trump’s position. However, U.S officials, former and current, were outraged by Trump’s proposition. The State Department referred to Trump’s proposition as ‘absolutely absurd.’ Former US ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul, who was also enlisted by Trump, attacked Trump for defending Putin’s interest against international and American norms. (Michael Mcfaul, Twitter, July 19 2018). The U.S Senate voted 98 to 0 to approve a resolution stating: ‘no U.S official should be interrogated by the Russian government’. Bill O’Reilly who was former conservative Fox News commentator questioned Trump’s promotion of Putin’s authoritarian principles in February 2017, calling Putin a ‘killer,’ (O’Reilly, Fox News, July 20 2018). Trump’s reply to Bill O’Reilly was immediate and reaffirming’: ‘There are a lot of killers. Do you think our country is so innocent?’ Trump asserted that ‘America also does plenty of killing.’ (Sophie Tatum, CNN February 2017). In March 2018, Putin was reelected to his fourth term as Russian president- fifth term as Russian leader, including

one term as Prime Minister. As consistent in elections under Putin's regime, the 2018 election disrespected international standards with the formal banning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, widespread election violations and voter fraud. (Epstein, 2018).

In May 2017, just before the NATO summit, Trump had a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and then-Russian Ambassador to the US Sergey Kislyak in the Oval Office. Trump reportedly informed the duo of firing the then-FBI Director James Comey, who he called a 'nut job,' prompting a US official to assert that 'Trump disclosed more information to Putin's Russia than our own allies.' After this event, TASS, which is a Russian state-owned news agency dominated news outlet space in most of Trump's meetings related to Putin and Russia. Trump greatly impacted on Putin's new authoritarian tendencies with an inexplicable breach of protocol that allowed Russia to control media space in such official gatherings, affecting public access to images and content of Trump-Putin related meetings. (Bromke, 2018).

According to Narolli & Julia (2018), Trump consistently agreed with Putin that Crimea is part of Russia. During a June 2018 G7 summit in Canada, Trump reportedly told other G7 leaders that 'Crimea belongs to Russia because of the fact that everyone living there speaks the Russian language.' Trump in a public press conference, went on to lambaste the Obama administration for what he considered as 'Obama's inability to prevent the Russian invasion'. Trump earlier made similar comments during a 2016 campaign address. (Trump, Press Statement on Russian Annexation of Crimea, July 27 2018). At the 2018 summit of international powers, Trump went on to suggest that Russia be readmitted to the G7 saying, 'we should have Russia at the negotiating table.' While Trump's proposition was eliciting heavy resistance from both lawmakers and US allies, Putin was offering offers to Trump to get concessions that would pave way for first bilateral meeting with Putin. Strong resistance to Trump's concession proposition came from State Department and NSC officials who feared the alliance of Trump and Putin is a danger to the rule of law, democracy, human rights and liberty. (Zengerle, 2019).

Trump against all liberal rationality signaled the acceptance of Russia's annexation of Crimea when Trump and Putin held a meeting during the G20 to the dismay of his National

Hill, who together have always maintained a critical position against Putin's new authoritarian tendencies from the Trump administration. Their critical position is majorly influenced by the January 2017 U.S intelligence report concluding that 'Russian President Vladimir Putin influenced campaign in 2016 targeting the chances of a liberal U.S president, and favoring Putin in the process'. (Sophie Tatum, CNN, July 28 2020).

Russian cyber interference efforts increased further, this time, directly against democracy. In January 2018, the Democratic National Committee alleged that it was most likely attacked by a Russian intelligence-linked hacking group follow. (US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Report, January 10 2018). In response to Putin's rising threats against the foundation of democracy under the Trump administration, in October 2018, the US Justice Department indicted Elena Khusyaynova who is a Russian citizen for allegedly working as the chief accountant at Project Lakhta. According to the indictment by the US Justice Department, the Project Lakhta was 'a Russian umbrella effort' strategically funded by Yevgeniy Prigozhin to disorganize functional groups and institutions of US democracy. (Merrick Garland, Head of US Justice Department, March, 20 2021). The Trump administration did not only undermine U.S ability to combat Russian disinformation against the promotion of democracy, but despite the fact that the 2017 US national security strategy explicitly cautioned the U.S against Russian media 'undermining the legitimacy and functionality of democracies, but also supported Putin with solidarity and regime appraisal. The State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC) which was specifically 'set up to counter Putin-led Moscow disinformation campaign against democracy and democratization process' suffered severe rejection under the Trump administration in terms of budgetary restraints and leadership stability. (Merrick Garland, Head of US Justice Department, March, 20 2021). According to Admiral Mike Rogers who was former National Security Agency head, the State Department made stringent efforts to shutter the Office of Cybersecurity Coordinator until the full intervention of Congress. Admiral Mike Rogers stated that he was later granted the authority by the White House to counter Russian cyber operations 'where they originate and where they target,' but not without intense pressure from Trump. (Admiral Mike Rogers, Office of Cybersecurity Agency report, August, 21 2020).

According to Dimitrova (2017), Trump's Republican Party was the party of Russia hawks for the past 70 years, advocating a hard line against the Soviet Union and Putin's Russia over democracy, nuclear posture, human rights, rule of law, missile defense, and even NATO enlargement. Mitt Romney who was the Republican Party's presidential nominee in 2012 most notably asserted that Russia was 'unquestionably U.S number one geopolitical foe, for opposing democracy, the rule of law and human rights'. The Trump administration in what appeared to be a return on Putin's 2016 investment shifted the Republican Party's generations-long hawkish perception of not just the Putin's regime, but the whole Russian anti-rule of law system. Through Trump's influence, Republican senates blocked a Democratic bill to force the Treasury Department deter Russia with sanctions on Deripaska - a central figure in the Special Counsel investigation for anti-democratic roles in U.S polity. (Clark Mindock, NYT, September 13 2019).

On July 3 and 4, 2018, a delegation of eight Republican lawmakers visited Putin in Moscow, alongside some representatives of the Russian government such as Sergey Kislyak who were under multiple US sanctions. (Schuman Edward & Adam Bromke, The Washington Post, July 16 2018). Their visit was a solidarity and legitimization of Putin's course. According to a 2017 Gallup poll, during the Trump administration, Republicans' opinions on Putin exponentially jumped in a dramatic measure of twenty points in less than two years from a 12% favorable rating to 32%. Similarly, polls from YouGov demonstrated that Republicans who perceived and reported Putin unfavorably had 'shrank from 51% in July 2014 to just 14 percent in December 2016'. And based on the research conducted and reported by the *Politico*, fewer Republicans than Democrats view Putin and Russia 'a major national security risk'. (Matthew Nussbaum, Politico Polls on Putin and Russia's popularity and threat, August 8 2017).

Trump's repeated attack on the press helped to legitimize Putin's renewed media repression over the January 17 2021 arrest of Putin's major opposition Alexei Navalny who was later sentenced to prison. (Michael Grynbaum, February 17 2017). Trump consistently decried the press as the 'enemy of the people', taking incredibly hostile position against the media, denouncing journalists and calling them 'the enemy of the American people'. It was Trump who popularized the term 'fake news' to demean credible institutions and instruments of democracy like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and CNN. While Putin has always repressed freedom of speech,

the Trump administration was a new era for Putin who expected lesser intervention from actors of democracy promotion. (Elizabeth, 2019).

Trump silenced Putin's critics, including former CIA director John Brennan, revoking his security clearance in August 2018. Brennan denounced Trump's invocation, calling it a push 'to suppress free speech and legitimize Putin'. (Bergmann, Lamond & Dessel, 2019). The authors argued that Trump built an administration filled with anti-democracy and pro-Putin. In November 2017, Trump made a re-tweet of three propaganda videos from a British hate group, falsely depicting Muslim migrants attacking white citizens. (Trump, Twitter, November 10 2017). Faced with questions of defense, Trump's Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders argued that the authenticity of the videos was not as important as the message. Trump violated democratic norms and principles in the magnitude that increased Putin's authoritarian morale. Not only his administration but his political life was generally defined as a deviation from principles of democracy and established norms. (Bergmann, Lamond & Dessel, 2019). From the very beginning, Trump spent his campaign repeatedly advocating for the investigation and imprisonment of Hillary Clinton who was his political foe. He once told the Attorney General that his responsibility is to protect the president who can make immigration decisions 'without judges or court processes.' He lobbed political attacks on not just the Justice Department, but also intelligence agencies, and law-enforcement officers, advancing conspiracy theories that could lead to the rejection of the findings of the intelligence community's assessment of Putin, and his attacks on the FBI for investigating his political collaborators (Jidda, 2021).

At the 2018 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Trump apparently delivered Putin's authoritarian notion of sovereignty. (Trump, 73 UNGA Speech, September 25 2018). The Trump's 2018 UNGA speech centered basically on the idea of protecting national sovereignty with any effective instruments. (Trump, 73 UNGA Speech, September 25 2018). He declined to questions bordering on Putin's longstanding support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, who pitches Russian forces against U.S.-backed oppositions. He instead, withdrew US troops from Syria, leaving room for Putin and his country to exert further influence, not only in Syria, but in the Middle East where the U.S democratic interest has been. (Bergmann, Lamond & Dessel, 2019). Trump therefore operated a blatantly pro-Russia foreign policy that provided further edge for

Putin's authoritarian incursion around its neighborhood and Middle East. Majority of the few pro-democratic individuals in the Trump administration resigned their positions. One of those was Defense Secretary Mattis who announced his resignation saying: 'Putin seeks to shape a world consistent with his authoritarian model, and to promote Russia's interests at the expense of both democracy and Russia's neighbors'. (Caitlin, 2013).

In Saudi Arabia where Trump had his first presidential visit, he took no action against Saudi Arabia for the murder of a *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi, even though the CIA concluded that the crown prince of Saudi Arabia authorized the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Trump refused to publicly condemn the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Instead, he said: 'The crown prince may have had a good knowledge of this tragic event, and maybe he had no idea!' (Trump, Press conference on his Presidential Visit to Saudi Arabia, May 20 2017). The silence of America over a murder of an American-based journalist, creates a more permissive environment for autocratic leaders to commit future abuses, and this is one of the ways the Trump administration played significant role in the new authoritarian tendencies of Putin, especially to journalists. (Orr, 2018).

The Trump administration was also hugely against the institutions of the international system. Trump attacked the International Criminal Court (ICC) through John Bolton who in his first major public address as National Security Adviser, pronounced that America would not only sanction but also prosecute officials of International Criminal Court (ICC) for demanding investigation into potential war crimes committed by US troops in Afghanistan. John Bolton said: 'The ICC is illegitimate and a big threat to US sovereignty and national security'. (John Bolton, Interview with BBC, September, 2018). Putin has always had a firm opposition to ICC because the international institution is dedicated to human rights. He withdrew Russia's membership of ICC in 2016 after the ICC released a report that classified Russia's annexation of Crimea as an occupation. (Loanes, 2022). In March 2018, Putin-led Russia poisoned Sergei Skripal who was a former Russian spy living in the United Kingdom. British authorities determined through chemical content analysis that the chemical nerve agent used in the poisoning was of Russian origin. The then British Prime Minister Theresa May described the act as 'unlawful use of force on British soil'. (Theresa May, Press Conference, March 19 2018). Trump's then-Secretary of State,

Rex Tillerson quickly denounced Russia's involvement in the poisoning, while Trump himself said: 'it sounds to me like they believe the poisoning was a Russian act. If we agree with the UK, we will condemn Russia or whoever did the poisoning.' (Clark Mindock, NYT, September 10 2019). Trump's rhetoric on the poisoning of Sergei Skripal undermined the transatlantic alliance since it questioned Britain's assertion without actions. As the pressure on Trump for backing Putin and Russia grew, White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders later released a statement pronouncing Russia as the culprit. (Sarah Sanders, White House Press Secretary, September, 10 2019).

By this time, global criticisms of Putin had exponentially grown and shifted from statements to action. Over 20 countries expelled over 100 Russian diplomats over the poisoning. As the international response grew further, the Trump administration surprisingly expelled 60 Russian diplomats and closed the Russian consulate in Seattle. (Angela Dewan, Milen Veselinovic, & Carol Jordan, CNN, March 28 2018). However, after the US announced the expulsion of 60 Russian diplomats, Trump was reportedly furious that France and Germany only expelled four Russian diplomats each, compared to America's 60. He claimed that the US was more forward-leaning in its response than its European partners. All of the events discussed above as highlights of the Trump administration, are analytically Putin's wish list. First and foremost, geopolitically, Putin has benefitted more from the Trump administration than any external political individual (Zaldastanishvili, 2021).

During the Trump administration, Trump repeatedly questioned the benefit and future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, while antagonizing stalwart allies like Germany and France. Trump pulled out the U.S from both the international climate and nuclear arms agreements. He officially announced U.S withdrawal from the World Health Organization. Past U.S presidents promoted democracy, human rights and the rule of law domestically and externally, while Trump in contrast waged increasing assault on the institutions of democracy, weakening those institutions, shredding the norms and legitimizing authoritarian objectives and policies of Putin and other autocrats (Zelizer, 2021)

Trump's presidential actions have been Putin's objectives all through his over two decades as Russia's autocratic regime head. In Trump's four years as U.S president, Putin remarkably succeeded in consolidating his international legitimacy, massively aided by Trump's brinkmanship with state and non-state actors of democracy promotion. (Bergmann, Lamond & Dessel, 2019). Although Trump continue to argue that his administration was tough on Putin, citing a series of economic sanctions leveled on Russia, especially those of 2018 related to the poisoning of former Russian military officer and double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, with a chemical nerve agent in Salisbury, England. (Philip Rucker & Shane Harris, Washington Post, October 25 2020). According to Trump in a Thursday night's debate with Democratic nominee Joe Biden on his second term aspiration: 'Nobody has been really tougher on Russia than Donald Trump.' He also made an argument in defense of his 'burden sharing' principle on NATO, that his administration's effort to strong-arm NATO allies into increasing their defense spending allocations clearly assisted in the fortification of 'the guard against Russia.' (Chkhikvadze, 2022)

4.3 TRUMP-XI RELATIONS AND IMPACT ON DEMOCRATISATION

The Xi's regime has headed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) back to personalistic rule after over three decades of institutionalized collective leadership. (Cha, 2019). The key question is: What are the latest authoritarian actions of Xi? How does the Trump 'America First' foreign policy contribute to Xi's latest authoritarian actions? Why are the rules governing leadership competition in China inefficient in constraining Xi's disposition to authoritarian leadership?

According to Kristian McGuire- Freedom House research assistant for East Asia in her '*Xi Jinping as Authoritarian Reformer, 2015*' 'President Xi unlike his predecessors like Deng Xiaoping or Taiwan's Chiang Ching-kuo, will most likely leave China farer from freedom than he met it, and one catalyst is Trump's appraisal of his ability to stay in power like Putin. In 2018, two years into Trump's presidency, Jinping Xi succeeded in constitutionally removing the two-term presidential limit, much like Putin also did, allowing the possibility of becoming China's life president. Although the vote was widely considered as rubber-stamping, out of 2,964 delegate

votes, only 2 delegates voted against the move, while 3 delegates abstained. Since the 1990s, China had constitutionally imposed two term presidential limits. Seun (2018) argues that while Jinping Xi is a power lover, the emergence of Trump's Chinese rhetorics had significant impact on such ant-democratic move.

Although, Trump pursued an isolationist agenda, announcing either withdrawal from, or de-funding of key international organizations or institutions running the international system. (Shepardson, 2018). However, Trump was quick to praise Xi for succeeding in his constitutional amendment for a prolonged regime: 'I like President Xi a lot. He is a friend, and I've known him very well. Xi is a strong and tough guy. He is a president for life and therefore, his a King.' (Trump, Press Conference, June 30, 2019). This admiration of a US president for president Xi was a boost to his authoritarian personality. (Tisdall, 2017).

Rucker & Harris (2020) argued that the Trump administration did not prioritize the promotion of democracy, and was therefore repeatedly silent on issues of democracy, rule of law, and human rights abuses around the world. On president Xi, Trump was particularly more silent. (Shepardson, 2018). During Trump's first year in office, then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declined to hold a press conference on the State Department's annual human rights report as it is traditional with past administrations. Instead, Rex Tillerson asserted that prioritizing human rights and democracy promotion could create 'obstacles' for the United States in other crucial areas. (Rex Tillerson, State Department Human Rights Report, 2019). The administration's policy of silence towards international human rights abuses weakened democratic standards especially in China, where Trump was absolutely silent on the human rights abuses of China against the Uighur ethnic population under the Xi's regime. The Trump administration also declined to rebuke the violent persecution of the Rohingya race in Myanmar. Instead, Trump supported the far-right Hungarian leader Viktor Orban for removing the liberal Central European University out of Hungary for the fear of promoting the norms and values of democracy in the country. (Cha, 2018).

Hass (2020) argued in his 'Lessons From the Trump Administration's Policy Experiment on China' that Trump's approach to China, propelled by a personal conviction that past U.S policies on China had comprehensively failed to advance U.S interest, impacted significantly on

Xi's strategy to unconstitutionally scrap presidential term limits in 2018. One of the aims was to pave the way for president Xi to constitutionally remain in power beyond constitutional stipulation in order to deter Trump's approach toward China. Upon assuming office, the Trump administration administered a significant shift in U.S approach toward China. Trump claimed that China was gaining in overall national power at the expense of the U.S, prompting him to launch a policy that according to his conviction would eclipse the US ahead of China. The overall objective of the Trump approach to China was to obstruct China from dominating the U.S-led international system with its intimidating economy and rising global influence. (Hass, 2020:18)

The Trump administration's policy toward China was strategically aimed at slowing the pace of China's growing global economic influence, while pressuring Xi to be more responsive to US priorities in the region (Trump, Foreign Policy Review Speech, 2016). According to Ward (2020; Vila-Gaudefroy & Lindaman (2021), the overall outcome of the Trump policy experiment demonstrated the exact opposite. Xi became less restrained in pursuit of its regional ambitions: reunification of Taiwan and the crushing of democracy in Hong Kong with the National Security Law passed in June 20 2022. The U.S.-China relations reached a historic low during the Trump administration: confrontations intensified, areas of cooperation significantly reduced, and the capacity of U.S-China relations to manage competing and conflicting interests atrophied. Ward (2020; Vila-Gaudefroy & Lindaman (2021) asserted that one singular factor that mostly escalated the US-China relations under the Trump administration, and which paved the way for Xi's new authoritarian tendencies was the Covid-19 and Trump's labeling of China in what Vila-Gaudefroy & Lindaman (2021) called 'Trump's politics of naming in the Chinese virus'.

Trump's naming of the corona virus as 'Chinese' and 'foreign' was not merely rhetorical, but anti-internationalist, and democratic, given the nature and level of required global response. Hughes (2020) argued that Trump was expected to lead the anti-covid crusade through cooperation with his Chinese counterpart. The author argued that Trump's naming politics raised issues of racism, as Chinese nationals and state officials within and outside the US were left nationalistically furious. Xi's response culminated in the interplay of anti-Americanism and pro-Communist approaches. According to reports on the database website of *Factbase*, Trump used the expression 'Chinese virus' in his public statement alone for over 20 times between March 16 and March 30

of 2019. (Vila-Gaudefroy & Lindaman (2021). According to the authors, the deliberateness of Trump's 'politics of naming' was ascertained when a photographer captured the script of his speech wherein Trump had sharply crossed the expression 'Chinese virus' in his official speech. In his defense, Trump asserted: *'This is not racism at all. The virus is of China origin. It comes from China. I just want to be accurate in my description.'* (Trump, Press Conference, November 15 2019). Trump also influenced important members of his administration such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to publicly accuse China of 'inventing' the corona virus. Consequently, Mike Pompeo, following Trump's footsteps, scrapped a joint G7 statement after its members declined to align with Trump in calling the corona virus a 'Wuhan or China virus'. (Vila-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, 2021).

In the bid to counter what Xi and many Chinese nationals considered as anti-China labelling, by early February 2019, Xi covered-up and repressed whistle-blowers on sensitive aspects of the corona virus such as origin and real impact. (Xinyung, 2019). Accordingly, the WHO investigation panel also faced severe repression. (Angela Dewan, Milena Veseliovic & Carol Jordan, CNN, March 28 2018). Trump's naming politics thus played a role in Xi's new authoritarian tendencies. Vila-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, (2021) argued it was arguably the first critical attack on a vital international organization by the Xi's regime. Trump vehemently lambasted the WHO, threatening to withdraw U.S financial leadership role in the organization rather than question Xi's repressive approach to toward the investigation of the origin of the Covid-19. Trump inconsistently heaped appraisals on Xi, through phone conversations and public press statement: 'I have great respect for you president Xi' (Trump, Foreign Policy Press Release December 1, 2018). According to Vila-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, (2021), in a public statement on the covid-19, Trump praised Xi: 'Xi is doing a really good job' 'He loves his country and protects it' and 'he is extremely professional, capable and reliable'. The Trump appraisal of Xi above came after he was asked about whether he endorsed and believed in the Chinese communist regime (Trump, Foreign Policy Briefing, February 18 2018).

Trump's well-established admiration and appraisal of authoritarian regime leaders played a significant role in his favorable view of Xi's leadership. His favorable view of Xi's regime and

Trump's concerns was his fear that antagonizing Xi's regime would jeopardize the US-China trade deal, hence his insistence on favoring Xi's regime. (Arezina, 2019). According to an investigation into president Xi's new authoritarian tendencies and Trump's response conducted by the New York Times, Trump resisted taking the hard line response also defended by many hawks, including US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. (Adam Ferguson, New York Times, 26 February 2019)

The Trump administration yanked U.S. funding for WHO, arguing that the United Nations public health agency was overly deferential to China, mistaking Beijing's fake assertion of having the corona virus under control for sincerity. 'Had WHO objectively studied the covid-19 situation from Chinese territory, unveiled China's lack of transparency, the covid-19 outbreak could have been contained at its source with minimized death and impact,' (Trump, Twitter, January 22, 2020). Two days after undermining the role of WHO, and threatening the withdrawal of US financial leadership, Trump sought to support president Xi in a way typical of his admiration and support for autocrats. 'I have a deal with president Xi, terrific working together with a president who deeply loves his country. There will be much more to come from our cooperation!'(Trump, Presidential Press Conference September 24 2020). On January 29, 2020, in a remark during the signing ceremony of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, Trump asserted: 'Xi contains the Coronavirus. The US acknowledges and appreciates Xi's transparency. It will all work out well. Particularly, on behalf of the American People, I thank President Xi. We now have a reciprocal relation'. (Trump, signing ceremony of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, January 29, 2020).

A January 30 2020 Fox News interview with Trump, and a February 7 2020 remarks of Trump at North Carolina Opportunity Now Summit in Charlotte, N.C., featured Trump saying: 'I had a conversation with President Xi last night. He is a good leader. I think people need to embrace his approach to governance better'. Trump's presentation of Xi to the global public as a good leader was instrumental in Xi's renewed clamp down on human rights in Hong Kong, and resurgence of China-Taiwan re-unification foreign policy objectives. The Xi's regime immediately changed the constitution to allow the indefinite continuation of Xi's presidency without constitutional limits. (Versteeg, 2020).

Trump's February 7 2020 Twit was more pro-Xi and anti-democratic: 'Great discipline is taking place in China under president Xi. He is strongly leading what will be a hugely successful

operation. I am working closely with Xi'. (Trump, Twitter, February 7 2020). There was a democratic policy space left open by the Trump administration which president Xi exploited in extending the frontiers of his authoritarian tendencies. (Patrick, 2017). The Washington approach to Xi before the Trump era was a perfect blend of economic competition and cooperation with democratic incentives. Xi from a position of confidence in Trump's support, personal strengths, set clear-eyed objectives, and executed coherent pro-Communist strategies in Hong Kong and Taiwan during the Trump administration. (Kirkey & Levesque, 2018). Consequently, the Trump administration was silent on the disappearance of the President of Interpol in China. In September 2018, the president of the international policing agency (Interpol), mysteriously disappeared without traces in China. (Interpol, Media Statement, October 5 2018). Media outlets later reported his detention by Chinese authorities headed by president Xi. Such audacious step, highlighting the increasingly authoritarian party system of president Xi under the Trump administration, only showed how the Trump administration facilitated Xi's authoritarian objectives. Accordingly, Trump was clearly silent on Xi's systemic assault on the international institution and human rights abuse. (Jim Sciutto, Gloria Borger & Jeremy Diamond, CNN, October 4 2019).

Based on the foundation of freedom set by Deng Xiaoping, hope that China's new leader, President Xi Jinping could morph into a liberal reformer was in surplus supply, even though many local and external observers sustained optimism in the Chinese Communist Party's anti-western stand to limit the process. (Wang, 2016). According to the author, just immediately at the start of his presidency, and Xi proved to be an effective authoritarian, rather than an effective authoritarian reformer in the manner of predecessor Deng Xiaoping, and Taiwan's Chiang Ching-kuo who set a foundation for freedom. Xi's policies and strict adherence to his party's objectives dispelled the possibility of reformation on freedom lines. The speculation of Xi's openness to political reforms were proved to be extra-sanguine. The new China's leader demonstrated he was far away from setting the country on a course for liberal democracy. According to McGuire (2022), Xi's early speeches as the secretary general of the Chinese Communist Party proved to be signs that he was bound to becoming a fine proponent of constitutionalism. However, Xi's leadership has clamped down on every words and actions attempting to put CCP in subordination to China's constitution. President Xi himself often states in categorical terms that he is vehemently opposed

Since the inception of the Trump administration, there have been divergent indications that Xi is an authoritarian with reforms- not in line with freedoms and democracy, but against corruption. (McGuire, 2022). According to the author, under Xi's presidency, Beijing has waged sustained anti-corruption campaign, leading to the discipline of over 100,000 Chinese officials beginning from December 2012. However, there have been countless assessments demonstrating that Xi's corruption campaign is simply an expedient to purge his rivals. Xi's crackdown on corrupt leaders stopped at its third year, stretching its scope into the investigation of top military officials and a massive extradition of economic fugitives. (Shuxian & Buckley- Zistel, 2019). Additionally, apart from Xi-led China's graft busters turning their satellite on state-owned enterprises and Macanese casinos to curb corruption, the CCP under Xi's leadership abolished China's 're-education through labor' camp system, reformed the extremely controversial one-child policy, and even mulled the reforms on the much-despised *hukou*- the household registration system of China. (Wang, 2006).

Xi increased his popularity with anti-corruption campaign and economic reforms that encompass expansion of free-trade zones, the linking of mainland stock markets with the Hong Kong exchange, as well as his experimentation with the management and purview of state-owned enterprises. (Yuan-Kang, 2016).

According to Yao (2018), President Xi now has a pragmatism and political drive towards economic reform that does not mull political liberalization in any way. The author argued that Deng Xiaoping who is the major founding father of China's economic modernization ended with a hope of freedoms for Chinese people, despite himself fighting against freedom and democracy. Former President Deng was not a democrat, and therefore not responsible for starting up China's process of 'reform and opening up' policies. He instead famously suppressed pro-democracy movements, responsible for ordering the brutal crackdown on student protesters in 1989. However, after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Deng's style of authoritarianism was consequently viewed as improved Mao Zedong's autocratic radicalism. (McGuire, 2019). Scholars like Kristian McGuire argue that former paramount leader of China Deng, made China a more open and freer state than current president Xi who has achieved far greater economic reforms through corruption

campaign. Deng in his paramount leadership was responsible for the abolishment of class struggle and rehabilitation of the victims of Cultural Revolution. McGuire further argue that Deng steadfastly initiated and championed China's opening to the global political atmosphere, and amidst opposition from other senior leaders, introduced "collective leadership" as China's pattern of governance.

In contrast, current President Xi has succeeded in amassing enormous size of personal power. In addition to being a President, Xi heads two key policy coordinating bodies in China—the Leading Small Group for Comprehensive Deepening of Reform (LSGCDR), and the State Security Commission (SSC). (Wang, 2006). These policy coordinating bodies are strategic and therefore gifts Xi unparalleled power to advance his personal objective on a variety of domestic political and economic issues, foreign policy, and security issues. Additionally, Xi has set up a cult of personality that harkens back to the Mao Zedong years to protect his power and influence from diminishing.

Former Taiwanese president Chiang Ching-kuo is credited with the legacy of lifting not just Taiwan's decades-long martial law, but also the persecution of critics and opposition parties. (Aekung, 1996). The author argued that Chiang is widely famous for setting Taiwan on the path of democracy. Just like Deng, Chiang left his country freer than he met it. In contrast, under Xi's regime, the CCP has imposed stricter restrictions on not just academic freedom, but on the press and Western campaigns for Western ideas such as Constitutional Democracy, freedom of the press, and universal fundamental human rights. While China's movement away from liberal democracy under Xi's regime started before the Trump administration, the Trump era proved to be more favorable for Xi's anti-Western objectives. The economic reforms of Xi and his clamp down on top level corruption signaled a possibility that Xi was going to deploy his political capital to push through liberal reforms along the line, however, recent official statements, policies and actions denigrating democracy and its norms and values, demonstrate that Xi is pursuing his categorically stated goal of strengthening party agenda in the principle and practice of Mao, which is to protect the regime and its goals such as the reunification of Taiwan, and the preservation of Hong Kong's China subjugation. (Tze, 2018).

Minxin Pei is popularly known for calling Xi's leadership as "tragedy of Dengism." As Pei argues, Dengism "gained credibility as its initiator, Deng, dismantled a destructive political system built on cruelty, leaving behind a more humane and freedom-bound China, built out of Deng's policy of economic freedoms and prosperity (Chiou, 1993).

Shuxian & Huang (2019) argued that Xi has turned Deng's path to freedoms on its head. There is now the "Xi Jinping Thought" enshrined on the CCP constitution and binding nationwide. The effect of having a whole nation socialized and indoctrinated on a certain "Xi Jinping Thought" has intensified since March 2018, following the amendment to the constitution of the People's Republic by the National People's Congress (NPC). Xi still remains the Party's Leader, with power and might to ensure the realization of the party's goals. This is a key theme in the propaganda preaching (*xuanjiang*) on the Nineteenth Congress which took place across Chinese schools and other institutions and offices. (Bergamann, 2015).

Xi unlike his predecessors broke up with precedent by refusing to appoint a "successor-in-training" as a sign of power thirstiness. (Fang-liang, 2016). Xi and Hu Jintao were appointed as "successor-in-training" five years before time. The unavailability of a "successor-in-training" and the pro-Xi amendment on the state constitution to scrap out presidential term limits, were a clear declaration of Xi's interest in infinite rulership. (Hsiao-Yung, 2017). Neglecting Deng's foundation and flouting the hard metal policy practice of autocratic leaders is a bold movement of Xi towards authoritarianism that has demonstrated Xi's injection of greater democracy uncertainty into China's political system. As Xi declined from nominating a 'successor-in-training', it becomes clearly unlikely that the precedent of appointing a younger leader to the Central Military Commission midway into the second term will be sustained. Xi under this political position remains the only civilian with authority over the People's Armed Police (PAP) and the People's Liberation Army. (Kai-shek, 2018).

According to Shirk 2018, Xi's leadership legitimacy in the CCP was weakened by the Nineteenth Congress as it downplayed the nomination of leaders on the basis of voting in straw

the CCP Central Committee rather at the Nineteenth Congress initiated and adopted a system in which two-hundred full members who formed what many considered as the “selectorate”- party individuals who by the CCP constitution are authorized to elect the Party’s top leaders. According to Shirk, in 2007 and 2012, the Central Committee held straw polls ahead of the formal vote as one step into intraparty democracy, and this was expected to continue under Xi’s regime. Although the results of the straw polls were kept in secret and based only on advisory principles, since final nominations were determined by a set of current and retired leaders whose precise composition remains unknown, at least, impacts of popular opinions were a part of the party system before Xi’s administration. Again, the straw polls boosted the legitimacy and confidence in basic election rules. For instance, Xi through the straw polls was widely expected to become Hu Jintao’s successor because he had earned more votes than his opponent Li Keqiang in the 2007 straw poll. (Guorguiev, 2018).

Xi has tightened control over the nomination process by substituting voting with interviews. (Shirk, 2018). He solicited elite views in 57 interviews involving senior officials. He included as expected the Politburo Standing Committee members (PSC) who interviewed 258 ministers, as well as the Military Commission (MC) which interviewed 32 military officers. (Li, 2017). The author asserted that many like Xinhua has led credence to Xi’s interview process, calling it a far more free, fair, and democratic than the straw polls, which according to him is often marred by voting based on personal relationship, bribery, canvassing, and haphazard voting. However, Xi’s replacement of the straw polls system with the interviewing system helps to erode elite’s confidence in his disposition to power sharing and relinquishing.

4.4 The State of Democracy and Democratisation in the Combined Era of Trump, Putin and Xi (2017-2021)

During the combined era of Trump, Putin and Xi from 2017-2021, democratic support : political institutions, governments, political parties; election assistance, and assistance towards civil society advancement dropped significantly due to Trump’s America First foreign policy brinkmanship. (Tisdall, 2017). The Freedom House announcing the 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th

consecutive year of democracy backslide, concluded through a 2020 report by Sara Repucci 'A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy' that the gap between setbacks and gains widened. She cited issues such as inconsistency of U.S foreign policy, the growth of mass protest, rising refugee crisis, and the domestic decline of democracy in the U.S as playing a huge role.

According to Larry Diamond (1995), international players within the framework of liberal internationalism provide assistance of various kinds and levels in external democracy promotion process. Such support as they argue comes economically or technically, as they have political aims and interests realized through the formulation or advancement of existing democratic institutions and practices. Diamond (2008) also argued that economic assistance makes a huge impact, on the presumption that economic development ultimately encourages democracy and democratization process. He finalizes that economic improvement is relevant to the legitimization and sustenance of a new democracy. However, as the Trump administration looked away, the institutions of democracy suffered significantly around the world to the authoritarian strategies and objectives of Putin and Xi, not only in their authoritarian regimes, but in their regions and beyond. (Fisher, 2021).

4.4.1 The Institutions of Democracy in Putin and Xi Presidencies.

In Russia and China, there are institutions of democracy as there are in competitive authoritarian regimes: elections, judiciary, legislature, and the media. Together, these institutions constitute the four arenas of democratic contestation through which opposition forces can periodically challenge the incumbent: the electoral arena, the legislative arena, the judiciary arena, and the media arena. However, in Russia and China, these formal democratic institutions are used for the acquisition and exercise of political power rather than freedoms, liberties and rights of citizens. (Li, 2017). Consequently, authoritarian regimes do not meet the crucial conventional minimum requirement for democracy. (Carothers, 2008). These minimum criteria are: Executives and legislatures are chosen through free, fair and open periodic elections, voting rights to virtually all adults without disenfranchisement of any form: ethnic, religious, sexual, economic, etc., political rights and civil liberties encompassing freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom to criticize the

government without reprisal, and elected authorities have real authority and power to govern without subjection to tutelary control of religious individuals and institutions, as well as the military. Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Putin and Xi are widely famous competitive authoritarian regime leaders. (Elizabeth, 2013). These two popular figures represent Asia and European examples of competitive authoritarian leaders of the present time. (Levitsky, 2002). In the past, Alberto Fujimori of Peru represented South American example of competitive authoritarianism. Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine were also prominent representatives of competitive authoritarian leaders from the European side in the past (early 1990s) Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia and Kenya through much of the 1990s equally experienced competitive authoritarian regime leaders like Jerry Rawlings (1992-1996), Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993), Kenneth Kaunda (1964-1991) and Daniel Arap Moi (1978-2002) respectively. Albania, Armenia, Malaysia, Mexico, etc equally all through much of the 1990s experienced differently styled competitive authoritarian regime leaders (Weiqing, 2014).

4.4.2 The Electoral Arena in Putin and Xi's Regimes.

The electoral arena is the most important of the four arenas of democratic contestation. (Dahl, 1989). The author argues that in authoritarian political structural regimes, it is either that elections are inexistent or the existing elections are autocratically guarded from serious contestations. There is therefore the elimination of electoral competition either by de jure or de facto as in the case of Russia (Elizabeth, 2013). Elizabeth assumed that, in Russia, opposition parties and their members, especially leaders routinely face severe disqualification, arrest, jail or even electoral ban. External electoral observers are prevented from electoral result verification and authentication services through parallel vote counts, which paves significant ways for wholesale vote manipulation and stealing. (Shlapentok, 2007).

Opposition forces consequently do not have much political or charismatic influence to seriously contest these non-competitive elections against incumbents in winning standards. The implication is that, according to the rule of thumb, regimes in which presidents are re-elected into power with more than 70 percent of the vote count can generally be considered non-competitive

electoral regimes because the possibility of repression are high and significantly visible in such elections (Carothers, 2007).

In Russia, elections are either nonexistent or the existing elections are autocratically guarded from serious contestations, violently overthrowing the regime leader or president is often perceived as a more likely means of succession than his electoral defeat. (Sokhey, 2020). Large scale abuse of state resources, institutions and powers highlight and define the major features of the electoral process and outcome in Putin's Russia (Alyukov, 2022). In the 90s, there are considerable instances, especially in the cases of Russia and China. Boris Yeltsin who was Russian president in 1996 and his Ukrainian counterpart, Leonid Kuchma who was president in 1999 faced strong electoral challenges from former communist parties, and found it increasingly difficult to deal with despite the institutions of democracy in their control. Their power instrument, network and political games encompassing blackmail and other propaganda techniques to secure votes had no significant result as Leonid Kuchma won only 35 percent of the vote in the first round of the 1999 presidential elections and 56 percent in the second round (Morano, 2005).

One of the consequences that authoritarian incumbents deal with when manipulating electoral results is the economic cost of repression which has the potentials to cost them the same power they spend hugely to acquire. (Galkin, 1999). This has been the case in Putin's Russia and Xi's China. In Russia's latest parliamentary elections in 2021, Vladimir Putin's Party won a parliamentary majority in an election widely marred by consistent reports of election fraud. In Russia and China, presidents Putin and Xi respectively control the electoral arena with maximum power (Silver, 2022). China's election in 2018 recorded similar amount of electoral manipulation, with widespread reports of normalization of authoritarian process.

4.4.3 The Legislative Arena in Putin and Xi's Regimes.

According to Carothers (2006), a second arena of contestation after the electoral arena is the legislature. The legislature in competitive authoritarian regimes tend to be practically weak, whereas in full-scale authoritarian regimes, there are either no legislatures or existing legislatures are comprehensively roboted by the political finger of the regime head. Comparatively, even though in

competitive authoritarian regimes, legislatures tend to be relatively weak, they however periodically become focal points of opposition activity. Instances abound in both the 1990s' Russia and Ukraine during which the presidents of both countries were intensely challenged by the existing recalcitrant parliaments of both nations. The parliaments were significantly dominated by former communist and other left-wing parties who repeatedly opposed every form of parliamentary subjugation by the regimes leaders. In the Ukrainian case, the Ukrainian parliament consistently blocked every unlawful and unfair economic reform proposal of the then President Kuchma. While Kuchma continued to threaten the parliament of individual and group suspensions between 2000 and 2001, the parliament continued to block Kuchma's resilient referendum effort to reduce the powers of the legislature. (Seyaz, 2017).

Notwithstanding, where incumbent executives numerically enjoy a vast majority of the legislature, the position of the opposition forces within the legislature to press for their interests is not affected even if limited. (Levitsky, 2002). Combined with an existing independent media where possible, opposition forces have the leverage to gather popular public support through media instrument which they can use to make calls for regime denouncement. The situation in Russia under Putin and China under Xi does not correspond with the minimum criteria for democracy.

President Xi in 2018 succeeded in eliminating the two-term presidential limit on the country's Constitution. The delegate voting leading to the passage was widely considered as rubber-stamping. (James Doubek, CNN, March 11 2018). However, out of 2,964 of delegate votes, only 2 delegates voted against the move, with only 3 delegates abstaining. It shows the strength of Xi's influence on the legislature. (Xinhua News Agency, March 11 2018). Since the 1990s, China had constitutionally imposed two term presidential limits. (Chang, 2018) argued that while Jinping Xi is a power lover, the emergence of Trump's Chinese rhetorics had significant impact on such ant-democratic move. President Putin also submitted proposed referendum for the constitutional removal of term limits to the Assembly on January 15 2020. The submission based on Article 2 of the Law on Amendments to the Constitution was subsequently approved. (TASS Russia News Agency, January 15 2020)

4.4.4 The Judicial Arena in Putin and Xi's Regimes.

The judiciary is the third arena of contestation. (Levitsky & Way, 2020). In Russia, President Putin routinely subjugate the judiciary through bribery, tax persecution, impeachment and co-optation mechanisms (Alyukov, 2022). As it is often the outcome, the regime lose so much economy in repressing the judiciary to almost regime breaking points. The author argued that Putin appears to handle repression well side by side with the gas-dominated economy. One of the clearest and popular first case scenarios of judicial repression are Russia and China, where several Supreme Court justices were politically blackmailed to the crescendo of opprobrium by Vladimiro Montesinos who was president Fujimori's intelligence chief. (Galkin, 1999). The author asserted that in Russia, the then Russian president Yeltsin removed the telecommunication lines of the court, removed the court guards, and nearly completely subjugated the judiciary over the constitutional court's declaration of Yeltsin's 1993 decree disbanding the parliament to be unconstitutional and consequently non-binding. In some cases, governments resort to threats and violence. However, the economic size of Russia and China in relation to the power momentum of Putin and Xi make repression effortless. (Elizabeth, 2013).

According to Elizabeth (2013), Putin and Xi overshadow judicial voice with executive high-handedness, leaving the level of opposition's courage and media support at non-resistant level. The arrest and jailing of Russian opposition Alexei Navalny in 2021 demonstrated the overshadowing nature of Putin's regime over the judiciary. Judicial performance is commonly better where there is a combination of formal judicial independence and incomplete executive control of government.

4.4.5 The Media Arena in Putin and Xi's Regimes

According to Meng (2015) in his 'A Change of Lens : A Call to Compare Media in China and Russia', the media is widely considered to be the central focus of contention in competitive authoritarian regimes such as in Russia and China. The author argued that, in Russia and China, media ownership and censorship are almost exclusively state- ways, making repression systemically easier and extensive. He further asserted that under this circumstance, there is absolute regime sabotage of

top ranking television stations, radio stations, newspapers and magazines, using state laws, state resources and propaganda.

According to Vila-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, (2021), in the bid to counter what Xi and many Chinese nationals considered as anti-China labelling, by early February 2019, Xi covered-up and repressed whistle-blowers on sensitive aspects of the corona virus such as origin and real impact. Accordingly, the WHO investigation panel also faced severe repression. Trump's naming politics of calling the corona virus 'Chinese virus' thus played a role in Xi's new authoritarian actions on the media. The author assumed that it was arguably the first critical attack on a vital international organization by the Xi's regime. Xi's clamp down on the media is the situation with most of the full-blown autocratic regimes across the cosmos. In competitive authoritarian regimes where China is classified, independent media outlets do enjoy reasonable dynamic media influence on legal operative basis, even though instances and circumstances of periodic threats and attack on leading opposition personalities abound. However, the Xi's regime has not allowed the media any amount of independence (Kim, 2019).

According to Norris (Norris, 2010), a case scenario within Europe is Russia, where the Independent Television Station of a popular media tycoon named Vladimir Gusinsky fearlessly served as significant channel of state criticism, especially criticisms bothering on Russia's political actions in Chechnya. The author cited similar cases in Africa, specifically in Zimbabwe, media outlets like the Daily Mews fearlessly gave resounding voices to opposition forces against Robert Mugabe government. However, those cases as the ones in South East Europe and across the Balkans, where the Serbian Belgrade radio station called B-92 was hugely impactful in the opposition crusade have no countering momentum. Within North America, Panama and Nicaragua represent the host of countries in the region where Newspapers played historically significant role in the oppositions' late 1980s political ideological activities (Carothers, 2006).

Subtle mechanisms of independent media repression often differentiates the executives in competitive authoritarian regimes from their authoritarian counterparts. (Levitsky, 2002). Rather than the dominantly forceful crackdown on oppositions and democratic institutions by full-blown autocratic executives, their counterparts in competitive authoritarian regimes routinely utilize bribery,

taxation-based suppression of media outlets and their owners, restrictive media laws that prosecute independent and opposition journalists under the pretext of national security law. (Schatz, 2019). In Russia for instance, the government capitalized on the debt owed by Independent Televisions to Gazprom which was Russia's major gas company, to transfer the ownership of those independent Televisions to pro-government forces who were schemed to permanently eliminate the growing influences of oppositions. (Timucin, 2021).

Maerz (2019) compared the regime of Alberto Fujimori of Peru with Putin and Xi, where both leaders succeeded in acquiring de facto hold on all the country's private television stations using a subtle combination of legal shenanigans and irresistible bribery. The clampdown included the termination of the citizenship of Baruch Ivcher who was the owner of Channel 2- a powerfully influential television station that became a thorn in the flesh of the regime of Alberto Fujimori. (Maerz, 2019) The Ghanaian instance represent the account in which the government of Jerry Rawlings like many others made extensive illegal use of libel laws to persecute independent newspapers. According to (Cunningham, 2001), those colonial-regime libel statutes were often deployed to imprison anti-government newspaper editors and columnists, especially in the 90s. In Croatia and Armenia, the governments in the 1990s deployed subtle libel suits for media clampdown, specifically in Armenia, following the nation's 1996 controversial elections. In 1997 therefore, the Open Society Institute in its usually sought detailed report, published a significant data showing that all of Armenia's independent newspapers had seen over 230 libel suits championed by the repressive government and its allies (Cunningham, 2001)

According to Cha (2016), China's Jinping Xi and Russia's Vladimir Putin manage their democratic challenges to exact domestic and international influence in order to sustain power. The periodic elections, functional legislatures, independent courts and media which are expected to institutionally provide opposition forces with periodic leverages are subtly utilized by most present-era executives of competitive authoritarian governments. Cha assumed that, as it is often the case with competitive authoritarianism, executive incumbents like Putin and Xi are situated within the circumstances of deciding between the violation of democratic rules, and facing a host of domestic chaos exacerbated by international ostracism, or ruling by democratic standards at the cost of possible regime power loss. Both leaders, their political parties and electoral outcomes typify those of Alberto

Fujimori and the Peruvian 2000 election (Marbell, 2019).

From the foregoing, the administrations of Vladimir Putin and Jinping Xi are not classed on the same level with democracy simply because they violate one or more of the four conventional minimum criteria for democracy. (Elizabeth, 2013). According to (Wishnick, 2017), Guillermo O'Donnell is one scholar who developed the 'delegative democracies' idea to assert this point while using the term to provide the destination for the differentiation. The author asserted that 'delegative democracies' are characterized by low levels of checks and balances with the kind of horizontal accountability that abusive executives use in the discharge of their political power. He argues that such regimes with low levels of checks and balances still meet the conventional minimum requirements for democracy regardless, and should not be put side by side with competitive authoritarianism which fall short of the minimum standards for democracy (Wishnick, 2017).

Regimes may mix authoritarian and democratic features in a variety of ways, and this is exactly the case of Putin's Russia and Xi's China. (Chen, 2018). According to Chen (2018), both Xi and Putin understand the role of the independent media outlets as state watchdogs, carrying out investigative and expositional obligations on government malfeasance in favour of transparent governance. Consequently, both leaders decided to become the independent media's watchdog instead. The Xi's regime Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has closed down over ten media outlets including Sina, NetEase, Sohu, Tencent and Phoenix, all of which provide alternative news to the majority of China's 688 million users (Chen, 2018). The author argued that Since the massive closure, China has dramatically lost the hope of media independence under the Xi's regime. Putin has shutdown uncountable media outlets also, and banning Facebook, and a host of other social media platforms at the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 24 2022. (TASS Russian News Agency, March, 16 2022).

4.5 Trump's Executive Orders and Policies that Favoured Putin and Xi's Authoritarian Objectives and Strategies

The key questions addressed in this chapter are: Are Executive Orders provided for in the U.S. Constitution? Which of Trump's Executive Orders target or harm democracy? And, how do those Executive Orders particularly favor Putin and Xi's authoritarian objectives?

Suri (2017) in his *'How Trump's Executive Orders Could Set America Back 70 Years'* succinctly x-rays the U.S Constitution, and underlined that the United States Constitution does not provide for Executive Orders. He further posited that every legislative decisions or actions must originate in the Congress, and then gain presidential signature, before the executive branch can execute the law. In this case as Suri writes, executive orders remain an efficient instrument in the hand of the President who can use it to determine certain policies and their executions.

According to Suri, the Trump presidency took the United States back to the nightmares of the world before WWII with majority of his Executive Orders on immigration, economy, and most notably, democracy, by: closing the borders, limiting trade openness, and delegitimizing press freedom through his 'Fake News' labelling politics. Suri in his final analysis concluded that the Trump four years administration was replete of executive orders and actions that aimed at tweaking, disregarding and creating policies not authorized by Congress, and which played into the authoritarian objectives of Putin.

Trump's first executive action saw him issue direction to agency heads to waive requirements of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). (Margaret Brennan, CNN, January 21, 2017). Although this executive action was seen as a symbolic gesture, regardless of a law's ineptitude, giving direction to bodies of the executive branch by a president to not faithfully execute laws is not only unacceptable, but clearly unconstitutional. (Sarah Kliff, Washington Post, January 20 2017). The U.S started the Trump Administration, with a presidential sense of commitment towards unconstitutional governance. (Kliff, 2017). Too early and too many, Trump issued seventeen (17) executive orders and memorandums in his first few weeks with the objective of delivering on his campaign pledges. (Quigley, 2017). While the move and number were not

considered problematic, a vast majority of these orders were basically unconstitutional, with institutions of democracy impacted. (Eagle, 2017).

Trump directly objected to following laws in so many cases. (Chief Justice Roberts, Press Conference, January 26 2018). The Chief Justice Roberts asserted that when a President does this, Congress has the power, right and responsibility to hold the President to account. Failure of Congress in this regard is an indication of violation of oath towards the preservation and protection of the Constitution. This is often interpreted to be the case where members of Congress are proving far more party and pocket dedication than dedication to the Constitution. However, Trump was severally challenged by Congress for majority of his executive orders and actions. (Wallach, (2017). The author cited one instance in the ACA executive directive from Trump which disregards the law. Apart from the ACA, Trump issued executive orders that completely prohibited federal dollars from going to overseas organizations for the provision of abortions and abortion-related care. He also issued executive orders for executive agencies to build a pyramid of border wall with Mexico. (Margaret Brennan, CNN, November 27 2017). The big debate with these executive orders is that the former President Trump was giving direction on how federal money was to be spent, a responsibility solely and exclusively allotted to Congress. While the Congress was furious that a President was being autocratic by his allocation of the power of the purse to his arm of government, voicing that 114th Congress must stand up for constitutionalism which they swore allegiance to, Trump was busy with further decrees. (Strauss, 2019).

According to Lynch (2017), proponents of Trump executive orders argued consistently that Congress under the Obama administration allowed the former President to unilaterally change immigration law related to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The author argued that Trump's proponents also referred constantly to the second George Bush administration when the former President secretly issued an executive order that permitted the National Security Agency (NSA) to monitor and eavesdrop on all phone calls made by Americans. One of US presidents who issued the most executive orders was former President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR), the 32nd President of US who served as President from 1933- 1945. FDR issued almost 4,000 executive. (Crack Alley, BBC documentary on FDR, March, 20 2000).

As executive orders went out of control under the Trump administration, his adherence to the rules and principles of checks and balances became severely weak. It became a far more than an ideological or even party-based concern that Trump issued executive orders for Congress responsibilities. (Driesen, 2017). During the Obama administration, Republicans cried foul over his executive orders and actions. However, compared to the Trump administration, democrats were overwhelmed. But former President Donald Trump was prepared to wield power in all category, as he spent his first week in office assembling not just a coherent framework for foreign policy, but like-minded party men and women ready to promote his ideas. (Zoppo, Proenca & Hudgins, (2017). The authors argued that Trump's goals were crystal clear from his campaign, hiding nothing from plain sight, and frequently understandable from the direction of his stormy tweets and attacks on domestic foes. According to Zoppo, et al (2017), Trump's ideals and goals were clearly represented in his executive orders which were widely considered the blueprints for the most significant shift in US foreign policy since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

According to Congressional Record, vol. 167, Issue 8, January 13 2021, the drafts of Trump's executive orders, most of which Trump reportedly signed at the Pentagon, were rather bold in their reach and prospect, considering how strategic and transformative they were, poised to alter the US-led foundations of democracy and peace which has existed for over 70 years. The Congress argued that Trump executive orders challenged the very ideas of liberal democracy, aids, cooperation, and alliance. (House Committee Session, House Prints, 116th Congress, 2018). The House Committee Section assumed that Trump's executive orders and actions embodied an aggressive dedication to "America First", regardless of global issues affecting poorer nations with impact on US global leadership. According to Ziblatt (2018), Trump had claimed that far too much had been given by US to the "defense of freedom and rights," and the "idea of alliance". He launched a direct assault on the liberal international order that has been playing significant role in the "Making America Great Again" following the depths of the Great Depression (1929-1933).

According to Ikenberry (2018), the liberal international order became a system of multilateral trade and alliances constructed to serve democracy interests and objectives while using its vast economic and military influence as attraction leverage for non-democratic states. It started

with the European Recovery Program called the Marshall Plan. The author wrote that the liberal international order was introduced by former U.S President Truman on December 19, 1947, and signed officially into law on April 3 1948 after Congress overwhelmingly passed the Economic Cooperation Act. What followed was the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which later became what is today known as the World Trade Organization (WTO). (Altay, 2017). This, together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and other institutions were institutionalized by the United States to lead a postwar capitalist system in the objective of raising global standards of living, defeating Soviet communism, and the conversion of China into a market economy. (Ikenberry, 2010). The author argued that the effect was gradual, but has been overwhelmingly successful in the last two decades. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a web of alliances in Asia and the Middle East, also became part of the liberal international order, and through them, the US-led alliances have been containing the aggression of states, nurturing stability in the alliance system, while promoting democracy and democratization process (Mearsheimer, 2018).

According to Mearsheimer (2018), the U.S power has been unmatched across the globe because it works efficiently through consensual diplomacy with committed allies and partners in every region of the world. What puts the US ahead of Putin's Russia and China's Xi is that none of them as US rivals has as many allies and partners to count on a committed support towards autocratic governance. (Lasurettes, 2017). However, the Trump administration started with a barrage of executive orders and presidential actions that diminished US position and leadership role on the international stage, and taking the US back into what Jeremi Suri called '*the historical nightmares of the world before December 1941*'. (Suri, 2017). The author argued that apart from closing borders without usual Congress reference, and limiting trade, Trump was intolerant to diversity in his executive orders, different in arms races, as he took the national race to the bottom on a one-man-approach. According to Kowalski (2019) in his 'Reading Donald Trump : A Parallax of the Campaign and Early Presidency, Trump's executive order on "rebuilding the U.S. armed forces" underlined what he called "peace through strength," meanwhile the orders he signed proved that he prioritized unilateralism and militarization, by underlying is administration's resolve for increased military spending, increased spending on nuclear weapons, and increased threats and pledges to destroy ISIS and other terrorist groups with 'fire and fury'. Haskins (2022)

assumed that majority of Trump's executive orders pledged to curtail U.S commitment to, and participation in international organizations, ban entire categories of foreigners from U.S, and placing significant amount of restrictions on economic and ideological exchanges. The author much like Jeremi Suri (2017) argued that the Trump administration run a United States any president from Roosevelt to Reagan would not recognize.

Suri (2017) argued that Trump's decision to withdraw from the Transpacific Partnership trade negotiations through another executive order constructed a magnificent pyramid of impenetrable wall on the southern border, creating chances for the imposition of high tariffs on imports. The author argued that through this executive order, Trump left the United States with a foreign policy that cut the country off the chain of economic relationship that fueled the growth of the United States and the liberal international order for over 70 years. The Trump 'America First' executive orders therefore isolated the U.S and paved openings for Russia and China to exploit. (Patrick, 2017). The key question was how the U.S could call for global help and solidarity in order to prevent external threats when Trump weakened U.S credibility on the international stage. (Kowalski, 2019). As Trump's executive orders made the U.S an international pariah, not only did that raised the costs for every element of U.S economy and security, but risked US effectiveness in curtailing Putin and Xi's latest authoritarian actions, by making the U.S self- absorbed islands which decline gradually (Slocum, 2017).

According to Slocum (2017) even the Trump team were driven by Trump's perception of enemies more than the analysis of U.S national interests in democracy promotion. The author argued that the team did not prioritize the historical sources of U.S strength, and so like Trump, it was quick to destroy the liberal international order with anti-democracy executive orders. Neither Trump nor the team think through the implications of the alternative order that would emerge upon the destruction of the liberal international world order. (p.14). While the executive orders appear courageous and eventful in the case of the United States jettisoning pesky allies shying away from "*paying their share*" and shutting the U.S doors against those he considered potential terrorists, the executive orders were not in consonance with US traditional democracy interests, neither did they "Make America Great Again" or safer, and more prosperous. (Suri, 2017).

Many foreign policy analysts agree that Trump damaged American democracy with his executive orders and presidential actions even if not permanently. (Dimitrova, 2019). The argument spawned a cottage industry of hand wringing over the condition of American democracy under his administration because no U.S president ever schemed to overturn legitimate election results the way Trump did, neither was there any US president in history who attacked the press, labelling it “Fake News”. (Kamarck, 2021). There was never also US a president who sacked critical civil servants, or who lend credence to dictators, as much as Trump did. (Philip Rucker & Shane Harris, Washington Post, January 26 2018). Trump’s four years of rhetoric was a huge blow to democratic norms. The guardrails of democracy held though under his administration held, because the institutions designed to check autocracy remained intact, albeit Trump’s attack. (Ingraham, 2019).

Ingraham (2019) argued that the U.S democratic system has been formidable for over 70 years, protected and preserved by presidents with undiluted interest in public good. Checks and balances therefore was not hindered. Since the U.S democratic system was designed to protect minority worldview while preventing leaders from authoritarian inclinations and corruption, Trump’s executive orders and actions did not completely destroy the 200-plus years of US freedom and rights gains, even though his presidency sent not just shock waves through a large part of the body of global politics. (Quraishi, 2020). Those who bemoan the Trump administration impact on democracy argue that he failed to adhere to established democratic norms, favoring the authoritarian objectives of Putin and Xi. (Tisdall, 2017).

4. 6 Putin’s Latest Authoritarian Action in Ukraine and Trump’s Position

Putin-led Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. (Ellie Kaufman & Clarissa Ward, CNN, February 24 2022). Since then, there has been a significant rise in western support for Ukraine, toward democratic victory (Michael Trujoli, interview with CNN, February, 2022). The political analyst argued that the favoring global response in support of Ukraine against Russia, shows that liberal democracy is widely preferred to any hybrid regime. People are widely concerned about freedom, and refer to freedom of association to justify Ukraine’s NATO and EU membership

interest, and applying the international law on sovereignty to criticize and isolate Putin. (Von der Leyen, Press Conference after meeting of EU-NATO officials, February 26 2022). According to Julian Zelizer who is a professor of history at Princeton University US, Trump's position in the Russian invasion of Ukraine matters in the examination of Trump's position on democracy and his 2024 presidential ambition. The 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict pre-dates the Trump administration, however, Trump was directly involved in Ukraine. According to Greenwood & Parnes (2022) in *'Ukraine Raises Stakes for Trump's 'America First' Agenda'*, the Trump's first impeachment in 2020 came at the back of his relentless pressure on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate his Democratic opponent, who is now U.S President, Joe Biden, as well as Hunter who is Joe Biden's son. And, with Trump's objective of reforming US foreign policy via US isolationism to improve US-Russia relations (Korobkov, 2019), his position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine was in high anticipation (Julian Zelizer, interview with CNN, February, 2022).

In an interview with Stephen Collinson, (CNN, February 25 2022), Trump termed the Putin's attack on Ukraine as "savvy" and "genius". Trump's position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine highlighted his admiration for autocrats. It also reflected what Stokes (2018) called 'Trump's long-held grievances and open antagonism towards the liberal international order, NATO and other multinational partnerships.' The key question arising from Trump's position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine is on the fate of Ukraine, had Russian invasion taken place under a Trump administration that attempted to weaken NATO and the EU, while lending public credence to Putin's authoritarianism. ((Bergmann, Lamond, & Dessel, 2022). Trump's appraisal of Putin even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, had generated uncommon bipartisan criticism, with former Vice President Mike Pence also voicing out against "apologists for Putin and autocracy" within the GOP. (Jill Colvin, Washington Post, March 5 2022).

Unlike Trump, many scholars of foreign policy have struck far more hawkish tone, suggesting as Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.) that deploying U.S. ground forces to Ukraine to stop Putin in favor of global stability should be "on the table." (Ryan Browne, CNN, March 11 2022). Trump has been heavily criticized for his tireless effort to provide justification for Putin's invasion of Ukraine as he termed Putin's action: "savvy" and "genius" on February 26, after Russian troops had attacked Ukraine. (Joseph Geden, CNN Politico, February 23 2022). However, following increasing

pressure on Trump from fellow Republican Party members, in an interview on Thursday with Fox News' Sean Hannity, Trump softened his view, asserting that the Putin-led Russia invasion of Ukraine was "truly a crime against humanity" and that "the invasion has to end soon." Prior to his assertion, Trump had repeatedly praise-worshipped Putin during his era in the Oval Office, where he consistently chastised Democrats who criticized him for his coziness with a U.S. adversary. (Pramuk, 2022).

According to Julian Zelizer who is a professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University, "We can now see the Republican Party against Trump's pro-Russia records as Putin's invasion of Ukraine unfold, while attempting to re-assert the party as more hawkish than it were during the Trump administration." (Political Analysis Session, CNN, March 11 2022). However, according to Doug Heye who is a Republican strategist, Trump's leadership style will be hurt with Republicans regardless of Trump's relationship with Putin and the way in which Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to dominate global academic and political discourse. According to him "One of the key features of Republicans is that they can differ with Trump, and criticize his policies and actions, so far as Republicans do not cross him on issues and ideas that are Trump-centric," By this assertion, Heye explained that "Republican would be critical on Putin and Russia or Xi and China policy, while backing Trump, or given the least consideration, shutting him up on the 2020 election and January 6, 2021 Trump-led invasion of the Capitol Hill" (Doug Heye, CNN, March 10 2022). Republicans, according to Ford O' Connell however, sticking to Trump come 2024 would be wiser. He argued that "Trump re-defined Republicans' foreign policy agenda with so much influence, railing against Republican foreign policy and redefining it into far better meshes with global realities." On Chinese President Jinping Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Connell argued that "Xi and Putin, do not ponder on traditional diplomacy in the way that the U.S and the United Nations do, therefore Trump was very correct to think about the executive orders and presidential actions that promoted his 'America First' foreign policy." (Greenwood & Parnes, 2022).

Astrov (2022), assumed that Putin undermined the preparedness of Ukraine to resist. This is corroborated by Trump's assertion put to Hannity of Fox news on Thursday Interview that "Putin was having a lot of difficulty and trouble in Ukraine because he expected a 48-hour deal without acknowledging the patriotism of Ukrainians as well as their ability to fight". The CIA's director,

William Burns, has sought to understand how Trump arrived at the 48-hour speculation. (Hannity, Fox news, 26 February 2022). Trump's usual rhetoric on the Russian invasion of Ukraine marks an uncommon division between him and fellow Republicans even as he eyes and mulls yet another presidential bid for the White House top job in 2024. (Astrov, 2022) However, the former U.S president appears to be now increasingly distancing himself from Putin since Putin-led Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but not without personal appraisal for Putin's ability to fight individuals and states (Stephen Collinson, CNN, February 25 2022).

Despite Trump's new effort to re-define his position on the latest Russian invasion of Ukraine to the advantage of his 2024 presidential ambition, Michael Trujillo (2020) argued that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has demonstrated why Trump is losing his grip on the Party he asserts so much influence on, and on the public which is increasingly realizing that Trump is merely a puppet of Russia's Putin. According to Christy Setzer- a democratic strategist, the Democratic Party desires to proactively seize on Trump's credence to Putin's autocratic nature to fault his potential 2024 campaign. She argued that "Americans and the world should assess and decide between a possible Trump-Putin Republicans as opposed to Biden-Zelensky Democrats". (Setzer, interview with CNN, March 23, 2022). In a press statement after an interview with CNN on '*Democrats Debates Biden Effort to Expand Map Against Trump*', Setzer argued that Trump's penchant for a foreign policy aimed at withdrawing U.S role in global politics is no longer markatable after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the firm obstacle posed by the rejuvenated liberal international order under Joe Biden's leadership.

Conclusion

This section has discussed the impact that Trump's relations with Putin and Xi has had on democracy and democratization. It engaged a comprehensive academic discussion on the state of democracy and democratization during the combined era of Trump, Putin and Xi, with a detailed academic account of the state of democratic institutions at the time (January 2017- January 2021). The section also outlined and analyzed Trump's executive orders, policies and presidential actions that favor the authoritarian objectives of Putin and Xi. The concluding part of this section is an

academic examination of the most recent challenge of democracy vis-a-vis the February 24 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Putin-led Russia, and the position of Donald Trump on the Putin-led assault.



CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 CONCLUSION

Introduction

Chapter five is the concluding part of the research. It integrates and synthesizes the issues and academic puzzles raised in the research. In order to provide a comprehensive examination of the state of democracy and democratisation under the Trump ‘America First’ administration, and how Trump’s executive orders and presidential actions profited Putin and Xi, this research examined the various institutions of democracy and how each of them fared: political plurality, free and fair elections, independent media, and the separation of powers between state institutions: government (executive power), parliament (legislative power) and court (judicial power). The examination of the various institutions of democracy helped in the assessment of democracy and democratisation during the Trump administration. This also helped in the investigation of the impact of Trump’s executive orders and presidential actions on the latest authoritarian actions of Vladimir Putin and Jinping Xi.

The purpose of the research is to understand and explain the impact that the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy had on the latest authoritarian actions of Vladimir Putin and Jinping Xi, and how that impacted on democracy and democratization. Towards the realization of this purpose, the research is categorized into five chapters. The chapter one covered the introduction as well as the structure and central arguments of the study. The chapter two functioned as the literature review section, and discussed a massive body of landmark debates on democracy promotion. Since efforts toward democracy promotion exist in a larger international context, discussion of comparative literature on democracy promotion and the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy provided the theoretical background for the understanding of the core driving force as well as the democratic pitfalls of the Trump administration. On the basis of the reviewed literature, the section also identified and defined the central concepts engaged in the research.

The chapter three functioned as the theoretical framework section of the study by continuing the academic narrative of the previous chapters with liberal internationalism, the U.S foreign policy of democracy promotion, and the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy. The section

made an extensive academic discussion on the role of US foreign policy in external democracy promotion and how the Trump administration shifted from the long standing policy through his foreign policy.

The chapter four addressed the impact of Trump's relations with Putin and Xi on democracy and democratization. It presented an academic discussion on the state of democracy and democratization during the era of Trump, Putin and Xi, with a detailed academic account of the state of democratic institutions at the time. The chapter also outlined and analyzed Trump's executive orders, policies and presidential actions that favor the authoritarian objectives of Putin and Xi. The section concluded with an examination of the most recent challenge of democracy vis-a-vis the February 24 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Putin-led Russia, and the position of Donald Trump on the Putin-led assault.

Chapter Five is the conclusion. It integrated and synthesized all the issues and academic puzzles raised in the research.

The study's central arguments are: 1) the Trump foreign policy centered on an isolationist grand strategy to U.S role in global politics; 2) the Trump administration is a huge gain for authoritarians like Putin and Xi, and a huge loss for democracy; 3) a decline of democracy in the U.S is likely to lead to global decline of democracy if a certain U.S administration does not prioritize democracy promotion.

Based on these arguments, the study addressed the following key research questions: How do we conceptualize the Trump 'America First' foreign policy? What are the actual executive orders, policies and actions of the Trump administration that proceeded from Trump's 'America First' foreign policy? How do these executive orders, policies and actions shift from U.S traditional foreign policy of democracy and democratization to the authoritarian objectives of Putin and Xi?

In order to test the above hypotheses and reach plausible inferences, the study examined and explained what 'America First' means in the Trump foreign policy, the objective of the foreign policy, features of the policy, as well as what informs the policy vision. The research conceptualized Trump's 'America First' foreign policy as isolationist approach to U.S role in world politics because Trump withdrew the U.S from numerous key sensitive global accords like the 2016 Paris Agreement and 2015 Iranian Nuclear Deal. In this case, U.S historic leadership impact on democracy and democratisation was replaced by Trump's nationalist focus: trade and security deals, anti-Islamic terrorism, and strict immigration.

The study outcome revealed on the one hand, that U.S impact which has been exerted through socio-economic channels and normative interaction with external states where it exports liberal democracy was missing under the Trump 'America First' administration. It revealed also on the other hand, that U.S assertive power on the international stage was drastically reduced under the Trump 'burden sharing' principle toward NATO and the EU. The revelations proceeded from the key questions answered within the body of literature: What is democracy promotion? What is the driving force of external democracy promotion? What are the means through which democracy is externally promoted? What are the limitations of international democracy support? What are the factors that can improve democratization programs? What is the place and role of U.S foreign policy in democracy promotion? How does the U.S exert its foreign policy influence to promote democracy? How does the Trump 'America First' foreign policy shift from U.S historic tradition of democracy promotion? And, how does this shift profits the authoritarian objectives and strategies of Vladimir Putin and Jinping Xi? After examining U.S external democracy promotion in light of the Trump 'America First' foreign policy, the study discussed U.S democracy programmes and aids, before and during the Trump administration.

The study revealed that prior to the Trump administration, the U.S financial support for democracy and democratization, muchlike the EU assistance, subject to certain political and economic conditions, aimed at paving ways for incentive-based relations between the U.S and target states was active and effective.

Chapter four laid the foundation for this argument as it addressed the concepts of ‘America First’ and democracy promotion, gradually narrowing the focus down to the anti-establishment, anti-globalism, and anti-democracy which are proven to define Trump’s withdrawal, and attempted withdrawal of the U.S from key global accords, alliances and international organisations in a seemingly pro-Putin, pro-Xi objectives and strategy. Such anti-establishment and anti-integration demonstrated in Trump’s withdrawal of US from the 2016 Paris Accord, the 2015 Iranian Deal, etc; attack on the EU, NATO and the liberal international order served to profit Putin and Xi’s authoritarian objectives and strategies.

Before arriving at this argument, the section answered the following key questions: how do we conceptualize Trump’s ‘America First’ foreign policy? What are the actual executive orders, policies and instruments applied by the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy? How do these executive orders, policies and instruments shift from the fundamental principles of liberal internationalism and U.S traditional foreign policy strategies and objectives? What has the impact of the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy been on the liberal international order and democracy promotion? Why has the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy had this level of impact? The chapter discussed how the U.S uses its position in the liberal international order and international organisations such as World Health Organisation, World Trade Organisation, World Bank, International Court of Justice, etc., and alliances such as NATO and the EU in external democracy promotion. It discussed the shift in US foreign policy of democracy promotion under the Trump ‘America First’ administration, how the Trump administration favors the authoritarian objectives and strategy of Putin and Xi, and why it is valid to conclude that the Trump administration was a huge gain for authoritarians and a huge loss for the liberal international order.

Furthermore, the study showed that Trump’s relations with Putin and Xi impacted on democracy and democratization as they influenced some of Trump’s executive orders and presidential actions that favoured their authoritarian objectives and strategies. In arriving at this argument springing from chapter four, the study examined the contents and nature of Trump-Putin-Xi triumvirate relations. It addressed the Trump ‘burden sharing’ policy toward NATO and Trump’s criticisms of the EU. The chapter four of this study addressed the impact of Trump’s

relations with Putin and Xi on democracy and democratization, beginning with an academic discussion on the state of democracy and democratization during the era of Trump, Putin and Xi. The section also made a detailed academic account of the state of democratic institutions at the time. It outlined and analyzed the specific Trump's executive orders, policies and presidential actions that favor the authoritarian objectives of Putin and Xi. The section concluded with an examination of the most recent challenge of democracy vis-a-vis the February 24 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Putin-led Russia, and the position of Donald Trump on the Putin-led assault.

In conclusion, the research engaged in the study of the Trump administration, beginning with conceptualizing the Trump's 'America First' foreign policy, and a foreign policy cum democracy examination of his administration's executive orders, policies and presidential actions. The study then scrutinized Trump's admiration and cooperation with autocrats such as Putin and Xi, and how this impacted on democracy and its promotion.

The Donald Trump 'America First' foreign policy has been conceptualized as a neo-isolationist approach to international politics because Trump withdrew the United States from key sensitive global accords that traditionally assert US position as a global leader. The Trump 'America First' foreign policy therefore is widely agreed by scholars to be the most radical departure from a bipartisan American foreign policy since 1945. This is because, unlike those of Monroe, Roosevelt, Truman, Carter, Reagan, and Bush, Trump's foreign policy attacked the two main pillars of the liberal international order which are globalism and multilateralism. Some of the Trump's presidential actions that displaced the US as a global leader in key sensitive areas are; Trump's withdrawal of the US from the 2016 Paris Climate Accord on June 1 2017, his withdrawal of the US from the 2015 Iranian Deal, his immigration executive order banning 6 Muslim dominated countries from entering the United States on January 27, 2017, his 'Burden Sharing' foreign policy toward NATO, his attack on key media houses and international organizations like the World Health Organization, the World Bank, etc. Putin and Xi capitalized on Trump's brinkmanship of isolationist approach to world politics to extend the frontiers of their authoritarianism regionally and globally.

While U.S core foreign policy interests remain unchanged as defined by every President since after WWII: to guarantee US national security, economic well-being, and American vision and way of life, the

Trump 'America First' foreign policy strategy differs significantly from the liberal grand strategies adopted by most US past presidents. It is widely accepted by scholars that the Trump administration did a very poor job in terms of democracy and democratization process. His administration instead, weakened the liberal international order and paved the way for Putin and Xi to increase their authoritarian influence while Trump watched away from external democracy promotion. It harmed economic and immigration coordination on the global stage with unilateral actions.

To defend the United States national security and economic interests, Trump adopted a neo-isolationist and neo-sovereigntist approach to global politics. Trump's approach was driven by his 'America First' foreign policy strategy which he declared in his *National Interest* review speech: '*America First will be the primary and overriding focus of my administration*'. Trump therefore rejects the US traditional liberal internationalist grand strategy, calling it '*a complete and total disaster*'. He replaced it with what in template is a '*new, rational American foreign policy*' aimed at '*isolating the U.S from nation-building business abroad*'. This also implies the rejection of the policy of democracy promotion. By so doing, the Trump 'America First' foreign policy rejects and withdraws from the two main pillars of the liberal grand strategy, namely multilateralism and globalism, and instead, replacing them with 'Americanism' understood as economic and military nationalism. Trump himself declared, '*I will not hesitate to deploy military force when there is no alternative. But if America fights, it must fight to win.*' (Trump, 2017)

As executive orders went out of control under the Trump administration, his adherence to the rules and principles of checks and balances became severely weak. It became far more than an ideological or even party-based concern that Trump issued executive orders for Congress responsibilities. During the Obama administration, Republicans cried foul over his executive orders and actions. However, compared to the Trump administration, democrats were overwhelmed. But former President Donald Trump was prepared to wield power in all category, as he spent his first week in office assembling not just a coherent framework for foreign policy, but like-minded party men and women ready to promote his ideas. Trump's ideals and goals were clearly represented in his executive orders which were widely considered the blueprints for the most significant shift in US foreign policy since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Based on Congressional Record, vol. 167, Issue 8, January 13 2021, the drafts of Trump's executive orders, most of which Trump reportedly signed at the Pentagon, were rather unilateral, considering how strategic and transformative they were, poised to alter the US-led foundations of democracy and peace which has existed for over 70 years. The Congress believes that Trump's executive orders challenged the very ideas of liberal democracy, aids for democracy promotion, cooperation towards democratization, and alliance. (House Committee Session, House Prints, 116th Congress, 2018). The House Committee Section assumed that Trump's executive orders and actions embodied an aggressive dedication to "America First", regardless of global issues affecting poorer nations with impact on US global leadership. Trump had claimed that far too much had been given by US to the "defense of freedom and rights," and the "idea of alliance". He launched a direct assault on the liberal international order that has been playing significant role since the depths of the Great Depression (1929-1933).

The US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations also believes that Trump assisted Putin and Xi to achieve their authoritarian objectives. In Russia, elections are either nonexistent or the existing elections are autocratically guarded from serious contestations, violently overthrowing the regime leader or president is often perceived as a more likely means of succession than his electoral defeat. Large scale abuse of state resources, institutions and powers highlight and define the major features of the electoral process and outcome in Putin's Russia. This is similar with China under Jinping Xi. Both regime leaders changed their respective constitutions to eliminate presidential term limits during the Trump administration. The key question was how the U.S could call for global help and solidarity in order to prevent external threats when Trump weakened U.S credibility on the international stage. As Trump's executive orders made the U.S an international pariah, not only did that raised the costs for every element of U.S economy and security, but risked US effectiveness in curtailing Putin and Xi's latest authoritarian actions, by making the U.S self-absorbed islands which decline gradually.

Trump's team was also driven by Trump's ideologies more than U.S national interests in democracy promotion. Neither Trump nor his team think through the implications of the alternative order that would emerge upon the destruction of the liberal international world order. While his executive orders and other presidential actions appear courageous and eventful in the case of the

United States jettisoning pesky allies shying away from “*paying their share*” and shutting the U.S doors against those he considered potential terrorists, his executive orders were not in consonance with US traditional democracy interests, neither did they “Make America Great Again” or safer, and more prosperous.

This research revealed on one hand, that U.S impact which is exerted through socio-economic channels and normative interaction with external states where it exports liberal democracy was missing under the Trump administration. The study outcome demonstrates on the other hand, that U.S assertive power on the international stage was drastically reduced under the Trump ‘burden sharing’ principle toward NATO and the EU. This is the key area where Putin and Xi benefited from the Trump administration which watched away from external democracy promotion and cooperation with NATO and the EU.

This result of findings proceeded from the key questions answered within the body of literature: What is democracy promotion? What is the driving force of external democracy promotion? What are the means through which democracy is externally promoted? What are the limitations of international democracy support? What is the place and role of U.S foreign policy in democracy promotion? How does the U.S exert its foreign policy influence to promote democracy? How does the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy shift from U.S historic tradition of democracy promotion? And, how does this shift profits the authoritarian objectives and strategies of Vladimir Putin and Jinping Xi? After examining U.S external democracy promotion in light of the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy, the study discussed U.S democracy programmes and aids, before and during the Trump administration. The study revealed that prior to the Trump administration, the U.S financial support for democracy and democratization, much like the EU assistance, subject to certain political and economic conditions, aimed at paving ways for incentive-based relations between the U.S and target states was active and effective.

This research contributes significantly to contemporary debate within the field of international relations on the relevance and validity of international factors in modifying domestic political structures and behavior in line with western programming. Building on Joseph Schumpeter (1942), Robert Dahl (1971, 1989), Joseph Gourevitch (1978), Huntington (1991), Schmitter (1996), Pinkney (1997), Joseph, (1999b), Levitsky and Way (2002), Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan (1996), and Pevehouse, (2005), this research makes important academic contributions to the debates on democracy, and the role, relevance and validity of international factors within the context of political configuration and ideology.

Furthermore, the result of findings is also significant to state and non-state actors of democracy promotion, as well as future researchers of the subject. The research proposes a new context of analysis for the study of the effectiveness of the current models of democracy promotion, from the context of the Trump administration and its democratic failures. The question that springs from this new context of analysis for future researchers is: How can other state and non-state actors of democracy promotion sustain the gains of democracy around the world if a certain US administration does not prioritize the promotion of democracy? The outcome of this research adds theoretical value to the analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses of actors of democracy promotion, as well as their models.

It is noteworthy that by examining the Trump administration and his ‘America First’ foreign policy in relation to U.S historic tradition of external democracy promotion engagement, this research has contributed significantly to the contemporary debate in the field of international relations on the role of international and domestic factors in modifying domestic and global political structures and behavior. While existing academic and empirical literature propel us to the understanding of the nature and impact of policies on state-building and related processes, there is still a great deal of necessary exploration and explanation, particularly about U.S foreign policy, importing democratic ideologies and institutions abroad for the sake of democracy promotion in an increasing authoritarian times. What is the cost and consequence of applying the common and yet old universal democracy template to promote democracy in purely illiberal regions such as Russia, China and Middle East? Russia has responded to the West in a way by invading Ukraine on February 24 2022, and demanding that Ukraine enshrines in its constitution, the formal agreement that it will not join NATO and the EU in future as one of the four conditions for Russia’s withdrawal. Re-thinking Democracy Promotion Models after Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: The Old, a New or a Synthesis? This is an area on which further thought and research could be focused.

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