

## Leadership, Idiosyncrasies, and Political Behaviour: Personality Analyses of Presidents Donald Trump and Andrew Jackson

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**Abstract** *How do leaders' idiosyncrasies are developed, and how do these, in turn, impact their political behaviour? This study traces the idiosyncratic behaviour of Presidents Andrew Jackson and Donald Trump. It details four historical traditions – Hamiltonian, Wilsonian, Jeffersonian, and Jacksonian. The study expands upon Jacksonian tradition and sees that how Trump pursued this tradition and how is his political behaviour remained similar to that of Andrew Jackson. Three specific areas in which these variables are determined are personal lives, narcissism and authoritarian behaviour, and populism and corruption. The paper also charts out the ways and means through which Donald Trump's administration is termed as Jacksonian in nature.*

**Key Words:** Andrew Jackson, Donald Trump, Idiosyncrasy, Leadership, Political Personality profiling, Populism

### Introduction

Political commentators were astonished to see the rise and rise of candidate Donald Trump through US primaries before the 2016 presidential elections. Trump ultimately won the Republican Primaries by overrunning Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush, John Kasich, and Marco Rubio, along with others. Trump got the highest ever number of primary votes ever cast to any candidate in history (earlier the record was held by George W. Bush in 2000 primaries), while, interestingly, at the same time, he was

also the person against whom the highest number of Republican primary votes were cast (earlier the record was held by John McCain in 2008 primaries) (Bump, 2016). Deep cleavages attached with the rhetoric and personality of Donald Trump divided Republicans during the primaries and divided the American nation after he won the 2016 elections. Two thousand sixteen elections were between two opposing poles and wills: women vs a male chauvinist, liberal

\*Faculty Member, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad. Pakistan.

†Faculty Member, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad. Pakistan.

‡Faculty Member, Department of Media & Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, 76080, Sindh, Pakistan. Email: [farheen.memon@usindh.edu.pk](mailto:farheen.memon@usindh.edu.pk)

internationalists vs isolationist, coloured vs white supremacists, and most importantly, between the “nationalists vs globalists” ([Merry, 2016](#)). Hillary Clinton represented herself as a candidate who stood for liberal values, traditions, a greater role of the United States in the international system, a commitment to the US global leadership, and a desire to resolve entangling problems faced by the international community and society such as environmental degradation, human right violations, non-traditional and traditional security challenges. Donald Trump, on the other hand, represented the non-traditional attitude, a limited role of the United States in the international system, curtailing the American commitments abroad, and a desire to develop an inward-looking approach, instead of outward, and going for an “America First” approach. Instead of standing for the promotion of democracy, free-market economy, and alliance commitment, Trump criticised the foreign policy elite for pursuing their own self-interests and agendas and hurting the American people. So, 2016 elections were not between two persons; these were between two versions of the United States: an inward-looking-nationalist-isolationist America vs. an outward-looking-globalist-liberal internationalist America. And to the surprise of many the former version – upheld by a reality TV star and New York businessman Donald Trump - won. Trump was an outsider to the Washington’s political elite – neither a career politician, nor having any military experience. He applied totally unorthodox methods of campaigning, had faced several scandals during the campaigns but very cleverly sidestepped and even at times taken advantage of those and targeted a highly specific audience – mostly white supremacists and nationalist groups.

During his campaign he addressed the grievances of the society that since several decades has been fed up with the establishment’s rhetoric and actions. Hillary Clinton was presented as an establishment candidate, always well-prepared to answer any question, having a liberal solution to every problem, the typical and at times oft-repeated rhetoric. Trump, on the other hand, criticised the establishment and offered himself as a candidate who can break this cycle and address the concerns of the common-man – the American man. He campaigned to not go abroad in search of enemies to kill and innocents to protect. He instead promised to always go for “America First.” This slogan and then the actions thereupon alienated the Neoconservatives who since last two decades have not entrenched themselves in the Republican political party but also made inroads in the Democratic party especially in the second Obama administration and as advisor to Hillary Clinton. America First rattled the foundations of foreign policy elites’ post-Cold War consensus that the United States is an indispensable nation ([Wilson Center, 2015](#)) and it needs to provide an unchecked leadership to the international system ([Heer, 2017](#)). Trump believed that his duty is to ensure the security and well-being of Americans ([Mead, 2017](#)) and not taking care of the interests of the Europeans or for that matter, other allies. America and Americans always come first, even if this approach hurts the long-term alliance arrangements and the position of the United States in the international system. Trump talked the language of the people and presented himself as the folk’s man. He promised to bring back the industries, to build a wall with Mexico, to halt immigration from the countries where people hate America, to cut aid to United

Nations agencies where the United States is criticised, to get it out of Paris Climate Agreement, and the list goes on. He adopted atrocious attitude towards the protestors in 2017, his spread of the misinformation and conspiracy theories, his disbelief in sciences, his presenting the alternative facts attracted particular section of the American society and he did receive overwhelming support. Violent right-wing extremism gained momentum during his administration.

Trump was not unique, and the United States has seen one president in history who adopted somewhat similar behaviour, Andrew Jackson. Trump is often dubbed as the person who has emulated Jackson and followed Jacksonian tradition in the US domestic and foreign policies. Though Trump was a businessman, the son of a rich father, a person who always tried to dodge the system in order to avoid paying taxes, Jackson was an orphan and poor and military hero who has fought and won a war. Though these differences exist yet, there were several similarities between the two ([Strother, 2019](#)). Trump followed the 'introverted tendencies' that has remained a peculiar feature of Jacksonianism, a departure from the usual American 'extroverted policies' intended to provide leadership to the world. He clearly signalled that he will not pursue such policies and would focus instead on the American nation.

Jacksonian tradition has remained alive through most of American history. It is evident from the fact that though they propose not involving America in the world outside, yet it does not imply that they hated war or attacking others. Once wars are started, once American pride is at stake, once America itself is threatened, then they always go for taking it to the logical end – the unabashed and unequivocal victory of the United States at any cost. They supported wars,

bombardment, ruthlessness against the enemy once wars are launched. Presidents through most of history have always worried more about losing public support than losing the wars. Vietnam War, World War-II, Korean War, the Afghan war, Iraq wars are peculiar examples. Presidents fear losing wars and public support. President Bush Sr. lost popular support because he did not bring a logical end to the war started in Iraq. It is believed that had he brought Saddam Hussain to justice, put an end to his regime, and declared a total victory, he could have won the second term in office ([Mead, 1999](#)). President Trump has pursued the Jacksonian tradition and avoided the wars but at the same time has tried to bring wars that already have been started by the United States to a logical conclusion – not the unprepared and immature withdrawal of the US forces from the ground.

This study is an attempt to explore Trumpian and Jacksonian traditions. How are their idiosyncrasies developed? Why Donald Trump is known as the Jacksonian president. What are the main features of Jacksonian and other historical traditions attached with the American statesmen? This qualitative research is conducted using historical content analysis. The paper is organised in a manner to give an introduction of different traditions in the United States, followed by a detailed analysis of Jacksonian tradition. It then embarks upon detailing the idiosyncratic developments of the two presidents and their beliefs and conditions that impacted their policies.

### Historical Traditions in the United States

Tradition in this study refers to the set of behavioural patterns of individual, group, state, or even the system. Historical traditions in the United States refer to the coherent structural and normative guidelines about

how the state behaves and ought to behave. Scholars have delineated several 'isms' such as liberalism, internationalism, isolationism, moralism, pragmatism, legalism, utopianism, realism as the traditions which the United States pursues and should pursue. Out of all these, internationalism vs isolationism and liberalism vs realism remained the two most important debates which have provided the basic guidelines to the US foreign and domestic policies. Besides these, Walter Russell Mead has pointed out four historical traditions based upon the behaviour of four former US practitioners (three presidents and one Secretary of Treasury): Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, and Wilsonian (Mead, 2013). Although these generalizations and simplifications can be misleading at times, yet these do provide a template on the basis of which we can judge or misjudge any US president. Hamiltonian tradition stands for the protection of commerce, Jeffersonian for the maintenance of the democratic system, Jacksonians stands for the populist tendency and military strength, while followers of Wilsonian tradition stand for the moral principles and internationalism (Mead, 2013).

Hamiltonian are the supporters of commerce, free trade, open seas, and open doors. They are the ones who always look for options where stability exists and where incentives for adventurous behaviour are minimal. They tend more to be idealist than the ones who pursue purely self-interested policies (Douthat, 2020). This tradition is named after the US first Secretary of Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, who founded the Federalist party and worked for making America a "commercial republic" (Clarke & Ricketts, 2017; Mead, 2013).

Wilsonian tradition is named after the US president Woodrow Wilson who first avoided World War-I for almost three years and then

fought it to 'end all war' (Knock, 1992). His famous fourteen points provided the foundation of what today we call the Wilsonian tradition (Wilson, 1918). Wilsonian are the idealists, the ones who pursue moral principles – though through soft or hard means. Soft Wilsonian believed in the promotion of democracy and universal moral values through diplomacy, trade, commerce, and other soft means. While hard, Wilsonian, at times known as neoconservatives, is the ones who do not hesitate to use military force in order to spread democracy in the dark corners of the world (Fukuyama, 2004). Most of the US presidents in the post-cold war era have either been attached with one or the other version of the Wilsonian tradition.

Jeffersonians are the protectors of freedoms. This tradition is named after the US first Secretary of State and later President Thomas Jefferson, who founded the Democratic-Republican political party. Jefferson always stood for republicanism and the establishment of democratic values at home. They are usually known as the defenders of the First Amendment, which ensured the freedom of speech and prevented the state from establishing a state religion. Jeffersonians are against empire building and American adventures abroad, considering foreign wars as unjust mistakes that the United States have made and continue to make. John Quincy Adams was a true Jeffersonian whose famous Monsters Speech warned the Americans against the adventures abroad. He warned that America 'goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy' (Adams, 1821). He, on the other hand, ensured that the greatest power of the time, i.e., Britain behaved in such a way that it served the American interests (Mead, 2010). Jeffersonian efforts led to the United States going back into isolationism after World War-

I. But great depression, World War-II, attacks on Pearl Harbour, and related incidents led to the weakening of Britain and ultimately, the United States had to step in to fill the vacuum and take on the leadership role of the world – This role was a dream of the Hamiltonians and Wilsonians, that had come true; but for Jeffersonians, this was a nightmare, the one which the United States cannot avoid ([Mead, 2010](#)). While Jeffersonians are mostly linked with the First Amendment, Jacksonian are after the biggest supporters of the US Second Amendment, which deals with the right to carry arms.

Jacksonians are the followers and heirs of President Andrew Jackson. In the 1824 elections, Jackson got the higher number of popular and electoral votes, but no candidate could gain the electoral college votes' requisite majority. So, the decision went to Congress, where John Quincy Adams, with the help of Henry Clay, became the president. Jackson called it the 'corrupt bargain' ([Independence Hall Association, 2020](#)). He and his supporters soon founded the Democratic Party and started a campaign for the next election even before the start of the Adams presidency. The experience antagonised Jackson and his followers vis-à-vis the political elite of the time. He immediately started advocating for a federal structure where centre will not be that strong. He considered a strong centre would lead to the clustering of the rich and corrupt aristocrats at the cost of the liberties of the common man.

Jacksonian tradition relies upon the 'principles of populism, individualism, honor, and courage' ([Clarke & Ricketts, 2017](#)). Jacksonians believed that the government's ultimate objective should be to take care of the common man's security – political, economic, and moral ([Mead, 1999](#)). They

attach huge emphasis to the concepts of honour, prestige, and glory.

Another major feature attached with Jacksonians remained the abhorrence of American military entanglement with the outside world. But once entangled, then making sure – to protect the honour and glory – that the war reaches a logical end, which is only one: the complete and unconditional surrender of the enemy and a total victory. Most of them never regretted using atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki ([Mead, 2016](#)). Besides, another characteristic feature of Jacksonians remained their refusal to go for normalisation of the relations with the state, which has been declared as the enemy or belligerent. And finally, in the absence of a direct threat to America itself, their reluctance to adopt military adventurism ([Clarke & Ricketts, 2017](#)). They supported President George W. Bush in the war against Iraq because they considered that Saddam Hussein in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) is a direct threat to the United States. But once they realised that the Bush administration has fabricated lies in order to invade Iraq, they felt betrayed and mostly withdrew their support from Bush Jr. and even the Republicans and voted for a Democrat candidate Barrack Obama in 2008 elections. Donald Trump earned their support and favour by criticising the policies of George W. Bush and especially his policies vis-à-vis Iraq ([Mead, 2016](#)).

The biggest trait of Jacksonians remains their appeal to populism which in this case remains "nationalist, egalitarian, [and] individualistic ([Mead, 2016](#)). Their appeal to the people becomes so strong that even the mother political parties lose control of the elections and have to rely upon the populist leader while fearing antagonising him. On the question of race, Jacksonians have remained

quite vocal against the blacks and other coloured people. Some alt-right groups have even tried to revive the old Jacksonian racist fervour ([Mead, 2016](#)). Besides racial issues with the coloured people, now they have started targeting Islam and Muslims, being considered as alien to the American culture. Another important issue where most of the Jacksonian unite remains their defence of the Second Amendment, which notes, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed" ([US Congress, 1791b](#)). The right to carry a gun is often considered as the basic right violating which they think that their liberties are endangered.

### Trumpism and Jacksonian Tradition

This part of the paper will try to find the similarities between Trumpism and Jacksonianism in the United States foreign and domestic policies. It is also tried to see that what similarities the two presidents share and how are they different from each other.

### Similarities in Personal Lives and Development of Idiosyncrasies

President Jackson had to face a few of the worst forms of personal attacks through most of his political life. It is generally believed that there exists no parallel of personal attacks that the candidates and their supported hurled against each other during the 1828 presidential campaign between Andrew Jackson vs John Quincy Adams ([Rich, 2012](#)). Jackson was accused of having immoral behaviour when it was alleged that he has been living with Rachel Jackson – his wife – in a situation when Rachel's divorce from her former husband had not been materialised. Above that, Ms Rachel used to introduce

herself as Mrs Jackson while legally being the wife of her first husband. Ultimately Jackson has to hold a second ceremony of marriage with Rachel once her divorce was finalised in the 1790s. When it was finalised in 1820s that Jackson is running for the president, his opponents launched one of the worst attacks against Mr. and Mrs Jackson's personal lives. She got so upset because of this dirtiest campaign that although Jackson won the presidency, yet she died of a heart attack before the inauguration ([Kim, 2011](#); [Owsley, 1977](#)). Jackson famously exclaimed, "May God Almighty forgive her murderers, as I know she forgave them. I never can" ([Buell, 1904](#)). Besides his opponents also accused him of being the son of a common prostitute, and father being a mulatto-man. He was also accused of being involved in cannibalism, who ate Indians' flesh after killing them ([Holzwarth, 2019](#)). Jackson's side, on the other hand, responded back by claiming that John Quincy Adams has been pimping for the Russian Czar when serving as a diplomat in Russia ([Remini, 1997, p. 20](#)). Jackson campaign presented Adams as "an aristocrat, kingly and pompous" ([Strother, 2019](#)). He even accused Adams of corruption and gambling, for Adams had put a billiard ball table in the White House ([Miles, 1972](#)). With 178 electoral votes in the elections, Andrew Jackson won, while John Quincy Adams could secure only 83 electoral votes.

During and after the 2016 elections, Donald Trump and his family have to face a similar personal tirade. Newspapers and magazine dug out the nude GQ photoshoot of Trump's third wife, Melania Trump when she worked as a model. Some newspapers even published those photos ([Editors, 2017](#); [Pengelly, 2019](#)). It was even accused that she got naturalised only because of her marriage with Donald Trump ([Lind, 2016](#)). During his



presidency, his opponents even gone to the length of questioning the relationship between Donald Trump and his daughter Ivanka Trump ([Dixon, 2020](#); [Ross, 2020](#)). People dug out his sexist statements that he had made vis-à-vis women. His audio recordings surfaced where he was heard making sexist comments about the women. Several women also came forward with accusations that Trump has sexually harassed and even assaulted them ([Relman, 2020, p. 26](#)). This study intends not to authenticate the claims, yet only wishes to point out that the personal attacks against Trump and his family remained a permanent feature of his presidency.

### Narcissist and Authoritarian Behaviour

Leaders' personalities, their childhood experiences, their narcissism affect their leadership style ([Mirza, 2018](#)). Both presidents Jackson and Trump share narcissistic, self-centred, self-righteous, and authoritarian behavioural traits. President Jackson increasingly became authoritarian in his behaviour during two terms in office. He challenged and vetoed a large number of the Congressional legislation. He even ignored the rulings of the Supreme Court ([Strother, 2019](#)). John Henry Eaton published a book filled with the praises and flattery of Andrew Jackson, who in turn appointed him Secretary of War and territorial governor of Florida when he became president ([Lowe, 1952](#)). Jackson served as a military general, was outspoken, could easily be angered and held grudges against the adversaries or those whom he judged to be against him ([Strother, 2019](#)). He showed damning behaviour towards the opposition, launched personal attacks, and filled with punitive rhetoric. Tanel has pointed out several traits of an authoritarian leader. First, authoritarian

leaders always try to shift the focus away from the bad governance of the government to blame others. Second, they discredit others, especially anyone who challenges their position, the opposition, especially anyone who launches a movement against them or their misgovernance ([Tanel, 2020](#)). Third, they often securitise the normal domestic political or social issues, and this securitisation helps create an environment where the administration may justify the use of violence against the domestic and foreign adversaries. Fourth, authoritarians, considering that the courts at times may not support them, are always looking for extrajudicial measures to curb the dissent. Fifth, authoritarian rulers discredit election results – if those are not in line with their expectations – interfere in judicial independence and attack the media, which tried to give space to the opposition ([Harned & Jimenez, 2020](#)). Andrew Jackson and Donald Trump fulfilled these criteria. Throughout his tenure President Trump continued to question the legitimacy and efficacy of democratic institutions such as free press, judiciary, congress, and even the electoral process and elections. Similarly, while the Americans were dying of the Coronavirus, Trump was busy finding the scapegoats in foreign states such as China. During the 2017/18 protests movement, Trump called the protestors terrorists and threatened states to pursue strict measures, or he will send in the military. He considered that the protestors should be put behind bars for an indefinite period. Stalin used to designate anyone who opposed him as the 'enemy of the people.' On this basis, several hundreds of thousands were killed in the Soviet Union. Trump declared anyone who challenges him – from media houses to governors, politician, businessmen, lawyers – as enemies of the people ([Remnick, 2018](#)).

"In the ancient Greek legend, the beautiful boy Narcissus falls so completely in love with the reflection of himself in a pool that he plunges into the water and drowns." This story tells us that narcissists are persons who are in "excessive self-love" and have "the attendant qualities of grandiosity and a sense of entitlement" ([McAdams, 2016](#)). Trump got rid of anyone in the government who challenged his observation and even opinion about any issue. He sacked National Security Advisors, Secretaries of State, and hundreds of other staff members. In the end Trump administration consisted mostly of a bunch of loyalists who really cared less about the governance issues and more about the flattering of their boss. Trump liked (self-)admiration to such a level that he even puts his name on the Corona Relief cheques, "which is considered as illegal" in the United States ([Davidson, 2020](#)). A clinical psychologist notes that Trump is "so classic that I'm archiving video clips of him to use in workshops because there's no better example" of narcissism ([George Simon quoted by McAdams, 2016](#)).

### Populism and Corruption

Both Jackson and Trump being the populist leaders, divided the society into two camps: the common men and the corrupt elite. The United States since the independence, has been run by the elite and the establishment whom Jackson decried as corrupt and emerged as the common man's man. He was known as the 'Mob King' ([Parsons, 2009](#)), the man who stands for the common man and a champion of the true democracy where people get the right to decide and important positions, against the corrupt elite. Populist leaders usually divide the society into two groups: the corrupt elite or the establishment, and the common man; the bad vs. the good;

right vs. the wrong. Populist leaders rely upon this divisive rhetoric to not only attract the voters, but also to imbue a feeling of hatred against the opponents. 1820s was an era of mass politics and John Quincy Adams in his first speech to Congress used some discomfiting words for the common men, using which Jackson started the 1828 election campaign immediately. Jackson believed that the common men has the tendency to reach at the right conclusions and the job of the office holders is to obey the popular will or resign from their posts. Jackson dismantled the Second Bank of the United States considering it to be a tool in the hands of the elite in order to foment their corruption and the one to leech the common men. His biggest support base was the Southern states where he attracted people on the basis that the urban elite has always downgraded rural, agrarian Southern men. He continued to work against the presumed excesses of the Adams presidency, and restore the honesty in the government. He was the only president who completely paid off the national debt by 1835, a promise fulfilled ([Editors, 2019](#)). Though Jackson was against corruption, yet he started the spoils system in the United States – a patronage system in which jobs are distributed with friends and relatives, a system of patronage, nepotism, cronyism. Soon after assuming office, he fired around 900 government officials and appointed his supporters on these jobs, considering they deserve these jobs more than the corrupt elite ([Strother, 2019](#)). President Trump also rode on a popular wave. His election campaign was filled with popular rhetoric against the corrupt establishment. He rode a popular wave against migrants, promised to build a wall with Mexico and crackdown on illegal immigrants. He banned the entry of immigrants from several Muslim countries. He



created such an environment at the Department of State that a large number of career officers and diplomats left the department, thus creating positions for Trump's loyalists and favourites. Anyone who challenged or had his own position, contrary to Trump, had to leave the office, even if it is Trump's own appointed Secretary of State, such as Rex Tillerson. Trump at the same time opened inquiries against hundreds of State Department employees who have worked under Hillary Clinton that tells us that he remained vindictive even after winning the elections. Michael Flynn, H.R. McMaster, and John Bolton were the National Security Advisors who were removed or resigned from their positions. During both 2016 and 2020 election campaigns, Trump declared that he would accept the results only if he won ([Diamond, 2016](#); [Kapur, 2020](#)). And that is exactly what he did. He not only refused to accept 2020 election results but also tried to malign the democratic process and pressurise governors, judges, and electoral college members to support him by rejecting the results ([Gardner et al., 2020](#); [Wolfe, 2020](#)). He claimed that the elections were rigged in order to ensure Joe Biden's victory. He pressurised states to not count mail-in-votes after the election day while remaining cognizant of the fact that several million voters might have preferred this method of voting in order to avoid the rush during the election hours and prevent the spread of the Corona Virus. His final act of defiance against the perceived establishment and his adversaries was his instigation to the supporters and attract a mob, who attacked the Capitol Hill in favour of Donald Trump. After failing to urge his Vice President Pence to overturn the results at the Capitol Hill, Trump asked his supporter to "walk down to

the Capitol ... because you will never take back our country with weakness" ([Haberaman, 2021](#)).

## Conclusion

Andrew Jackson and Donald Trump have had the unique kind of presidencies. Both were "brash, abrasive, defensive and quick-tempered, and both were described as vulgar and unfit to govern" ([Killian, 2017](#)). Though Jacksonian tradition and Jacksonians have survived in the United States through centuries yet finding a Jacksonian president in the White House is very rare. Donald Trump, the rich son of a businessman, achieved economic power using ambiguous means and evading taxes. Following Jacksonian precincts, Trump became President of the United States in 2016. He fulfilled several populists promises he made in the election campaign, just like Andrew Jackson, who was a self-made man, a military hero, and also known as the 'mob king'. With an understanding that a huge chunk of the voters in the United States today are either Jacksonian or Jeffersonians, Trump followed the Jacksonian trend to attract them and set a divisive tone in the American politics. This not only infuriated the American elite but also a lot of Americans, who set in motion a chain reaction that resulted in the defeat of Donald Trump in 2020 elections, which were not between two persons, Trump and Biden. These elections were between pro-Trump and anti-Trump forces and ideologies. And in this classic battle, the populist tendencies were defeated in the United States – a triumph of the forces that represent liberal order, free trade, globalists, and a belief that the United States needs to regain its leadership role in the international system.

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