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A Strongman at Home
Is a Strongman Abroad?
Investigating Operational Codes of Aliaksandr Lukašenka and Donald Trump

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A Strongman at Home Is a Strongman Abroad? Investigating Operational Codes of Aliaksandr Lukašenka and Donald Trump

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Abstract

With the decline of democracy in the world and accompanying rise of political strongmen, the demand for studies which would uncover peculiarities of the illiberal ruling has increased. While more researches indeed started to investigate different types of regimes and autocratic leaders, the level of their sophistication yet remains low. This thesis aims to contribute—within the extent of available resources—to the emerging literature on strongman rule and considers the belief systems of two well-known strongmen: Aliaksandr Lukašenka and Donald Trump. This research adopts the operational code analysis and hence focuses on the leaders' foreign policy decisions. It argues that while the incumbent presidents of Belarus and the United States might indeed be strongmen at home, they are not ones abroad. This study discovers that the considered leaders possess low strongmen tendencies when dealing with their major international counterparts—Russia and China, hypothetically for the same reason. Lukašenka aims to sustain friendly and cooperative relations with these two due to the dependence of his regime on the external financial assistance, while Trump is also interested in maintaining favourable economic ties between world's major economies. Overall, however, Lukašenka is more consistent in his beliefs across time, counterparts and speech genres, supposedly as the authoritarian system he operates in allows to disregard any domestic constrains to his foreign policy. Trump, on the other hand, manifests higher beliefs fluctuation as probably aims to satisfy internal political demands without abandoning his genuine opinion. There is hope that the findings of this study will help developing strategies for the struggle against illiberalism which rapidly consolidates across the globe.

Keywords: strongman, operational code, belief system, foreign policy, illiberalism, authoritarianism, autocracy, democracy, Lukašenka, Trump, Belarus, United States

Introduction

'[Lukašenka] is definitely on this Trumpian side of this argument,
and even more Trumpian than Trump himself'

—political analyst of the Carnegie Moscow Center, Artyom Shraibman (2020),
commenting on Belarus' reluctant response
to the COVID-19 pandemic (as cited in Dixon, 2020)

In the mid-2010s, the world seemed to embark on a path of what Lührmann et al (2018), Cassani and Tomini (2018), as well as Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) called 'autocratisation'. The rise of far-right actors in Europe, North and South America, tightening civic freedoms in Russia, the election of conservative Donald Trump president of the United States are all considered to be the elements of an anti-democratic or anti-liberal trend (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019, p. 1095; Inglehart & Norris, 2017, pp. 443-445). The entire issue of *Journal of Democracy* released in January 2015 aimed to discover whether democracy was indeed in decline and authoritarian leadership in an increased demand (Plattner, 2015). To further strengthen these concerns, Foa et al (2020, p. 1) have recently learned that public support for democracy dropped over time and dissatisfaction with this value doctrine was currently 'reaching an all-time global high'. In this light, academic research has started to dedicate an increased attention to the analysis of so-called political *strongmen*—leaders with autocratic or illiberal governing tendencies—the mechanisms behind their rise to power and methods of their operation (see e.g. Dittmer, 2018; Ordoñez and Borja, 2018; Rowland, 2018).

A number of aspects, however, have been overlooked in this corpus of emerging literature. As Nai and Toros (2020, pp. 3-4) claim in their own piece concerning illiberal politicians, such researches usually put—for instance—Vladimir Putin, Jair Bolsonaro, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan or Viktor Orbán in the same line, assuming that their autocratic tendency in itself is what matters most, rather than peculiarities of their traits that distinguish one from another. Those studies that indeed aim to differentiate between different types of authoritarian rule, on the other hand, disregard democratic systems in favour of formal autocracies, as well as centre in the types of these *regimes* rather than of their *leaders* (Nai & Toros, 2020, p. 3; for researches themselves see e.g. Ezrow & Frantz, 2011; Fjelde, 2010; Wahman et al, 2013). Yet one of the disturbing phenomena of contemporary political context is exactly the emergence and continuous operation of autocrats within otherwise democratic political systems (Abramowitz & Repucci, 2018; Kagan, 2019). For this reason, a more scrutinised and diverse literature on

illiberal political actors is necessary. In the absence of it, those combating autocracies are left with only general recommendations, while leadership-specific approaches might be more effective in this struggle than the one treating all strongmen as virtually the same.

The other issue with the existing studies of strongmen is that they often disregard potential differences in leaders' approach to domestic and foreign policies. In the political research focusing on democratic regimes, there is Putnam's (1988) two-level game theory: it views international negotiation as a process simultaneously occurring on a domestic and foreign level. In short, the theory holds that political leaders first negotiate with societal actors at home to adopt the most favourable internal policies, and then on a foreign level, seek to promote so-called 'win-sets' which should further find support among domestic interest groups (Putnam, 1988, pp. 433-441). Although this model should only apply to systems where a leader aims to satisfy genuine domestic concerns, there have been attempts from Yue and Yu (2016) and Grix and Kramareva (2017) to consider autocracies within this framework. The problem with such an approach, however, is that in case of formal autocracies, the system itself allows governors to suppress intrastate demands at the first level, or—in case of a democratic system under illiberally-inclined leadership—they may personally disregard public opinion in favour of their own aspirations (see e.g. Hale, 2011; Ojieh, 2015). It means that the code of strongmen operation at different political levels remains unclear: on the one hand, they could aim to maximise their popularity at home and act in accord with the 'two-level game' doctrines; yet on the other hand, they may choose to showcase their strength by playing two separate games and adopting foreign and domestic strategies independently.

There are two reasons why the lack of such knowledge is harmful for democratic resistance, political forecasting and political science in general. Firstly, it leaves the opposition generally under-informed, especially with regards to the possible strength of external actors: it remains unclear in which cases international influence can help combating illiberal trends and in which ones it would not be as effective as domestic resistance alone. In turn, it deprives the alternative political forces and civil society of potentially successful strategies. Secondly, a deeper understanding of the ways in which strongmen aim to approach foreign policy—in itself or combined with the assessment of public opinion—may help to predict long-term survival of undemocratic and illiberal regimes. The evidence for that is in the research by Daniel Treisman (2020) called *Democracy by Mistake: How the Errors of Autocrats Trigger Transitions to Freer Government*. Treisman (2020, pp. 1-2) reveals in it that two thirds of all cases

of democratisation since 1800 have occurred not due to the opposition struggle, but due to the mistakes that autocrats made trying to sustain their rule. Crucially for this study, in up to 24 percent of those cases, mistakes were precisely in foreign policy, making it the most common reason for regime failure after excessive repressions, mismanagement of political and army elites, and electoral mishandling (Treisman, 2020, p. 13). In this light, understanding mechanisms that drive foreign policy of strongmen is as important as understanding those behind their domestic policy to organise resistance against them and build informed predictions.

In an attempt to fill the considered research gaps and assist in the struggle against illiberalism, this dissertation hence aims to uncover peculiarities of strongman rule, assess the differences that exist between political strongmen themselves, as well as between their actions on domestic and foreign levels. In particular, it aims to uncover whether these fluctuations vary depending on who is the opponent or an ally of a leader in question; what role does the context play; what political system and geopolitical environment they operate in and which of these have a more notable impact, if any at all. The dissertation examines two strongman leaders: the president of Belarus Aliaksandr Lukašenka, and president of the United States Donald J. Trump. They are presumably different yet similar in multiple features of character and rule, which provides a framework for the comparative assessment of these features interplay. The other issue that this research aims to uncover is how extensively the behaviour of strongman leaders transforms throughout the time of their governing: whether their tactics and beliefs are embed in the ideological beliefs, psychological and biographical traits, or do they depend on a geopolitical landscape and are driven by opportunism.

In order to address the posed questions, this research adopts the method called operational code[1] analysis. Originally coined by Nathan Leites in 1951 to examine the Soviet *Politburo*, this approach to leadership assessment focused on pre-existing political and philosophical beliefs of key political actors and their implications to decision-making processes within the government (Leites, 1951, pp. xi-xii). This approach did not receive significant popularity until Alexander George clarified and complemented it in 1969 (Walker, 1977, pp. 130-131). He introduced a set of ten questions that could uncover leaders' perception of the geopolitical universe and preferred means for addressing the issues arising within it (George, 1969). The system was meant to assess and predict the behaviour of political leaders based on what they say in public addresses, interviews or other similar instances of communication. It found fur-

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[1] Further also referred to as 'the OC', for short.

ther scrutinisation in multiple studies by e.g. Walker (1977), Walker and Schafer (2006), Walker et al (1998), Walker et al (1999), Schafer and Walker (2006), and particularly in *Profiling the Operational Codes of Political Leaders* by Walker et al (2003), which introduced a detailed methodology for its analysis on the basis of Verbs in Context System (VICS). Sections I and II of this thesis elaborate on these matters.

Two cases of strongman politicians that this paper adopts to conduct the analysis are Aliaksandr Lukašenka and Donald Trump. These two leaders share a common public image of eccentric illiberal actors and are infamous for inconsistence in their rhetoric (Astapova, 2016; Jackson, 2017). It leads numerous academic and media articles to doubt whether Lukašenka and Trump manifest and act in accord with their true beliefs rather than showing off changing images that they believe would most benefit the given context (see e.g. Davidson, 2019, pp. 129, 136; Nice, 2012, p. 12; Wilson, 2011, as cited in Kuzio, 2015, p. 685; Scheppele, 2019, p. 314; Goldberg, 2020). Despite their strongmanship is different in premises—i.e Lukašenka is a former collective farm director running a small state (Sannikov, 2005, p. 75), while Trump is a billionaire in the head of a global superpower (Gusterson, 2017, p. 210)—they seem to manifest similar patterns in approaching opponents and allies, as well as in dealing with geopolitical challenges. In their speech, both use simple words, champion populist solutions, and claim to control virtually everything that occurs in the countries which they head (see Goujon, 1999; Wilson, 2011; Jackson, 2017; Kellner, 2018b). Indeed, in order to effectively utilise such rhetoric, they seem to amend their views as marked earlier.

In line with the most similar system research design (MSSD) (Anckar, 2008), the apparent similarity of these leaders is catching to examine due to the existence of yet a prominent difference between them: a political system they operate in. Apart from different geopolitical statuses of the given presidential states, they also embody the opposing types of political regimes. The United States is the oldest continuous democracy in the world with arguably one of the strongest systems of checks and balances (Weaver and Rockman, 2010, p. 1), while Belarus is a full-fledged autocracy with virtually non-existent influence of any institutions on the decision-making power of the president (Allison et al, 2005; Azarkevich, 2018, p. 41). This research hence believes that focusing on these two particular cases of illiberal leaders would allow to isolate its features of interest as a highly similar character of the considered strongmen put in different political setups should disclose the impact of non-personal—but rather system-related—aspects on strongman behaviour.

To make the context of the analysis as balanced and representative for both cases as possible, this research has decided to concentrate predominantly on the countries' foreign policy towards Russia and China. Both Belarus and the US have vibrant and diverse relations with these two states, which allows the study to be comprehensive and cover exactly the differences in leaders' traits rather than in inter-state relations as such. Importantly, Russia—to a larger extent, and China—to a lesser, are the major subjects of beliefs inconsistency of the considered leaders. For instance, both Donald Trump and Aliaksandr Lukašenka often change their publicly manifested attitude to Vladimir Putin and the Russian government from exclusively negative to ultimately positive, perhaps depending on the circumstances and calculation of their prospective gains and losses (Astapova, 2016; Azarkevich, 2016; Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2018; Kellner, 2018a; Paul, 2017). China, on the other hand, is a major economic counterpart of both states: it is arguably the number one rival of the US and the second-to-Russia partner of Belarus (Breslin, 2016; Ghosh et al, 2018; Braga, 2016; Rousseau, 2012). It brings as the result rather sensitive relations between the states that have never been easy, but instead prone to rhetorical and political switches in light of the frequent challenges (see Braga, 2016; Garver, 2002; Marples, 2013; McFaul, 2005). It hence seems rational to concentrate on those instances of communication relating to these states.

The structure of this dissertation is the following. Firstly, the literature review in the section *I. Premises Setup* uncovers the definitions of strongmanship and strongman; explores the studies on strongman behaviour, as well as broader literature on political psychology and associated typology; concerns the biographies of Lukašenka and Trump, their already known traits, beliefs and tactics. This section also provides the definition of operational code, history of its analysis and explains supposed mechanisms behind its action. The gaps existing in the literature above are identified along the way. Secondly, the section dedicated to the methodology of this research and titled *II. Approach to Analysis* introduces the principles of VICS method, explains how the data has been collected, systematised, coded and interpreted, as well as clarifies the timeframe and context of the analysis. The section *III. Results: What Do They Believe In?* presents the revealed images of Lukašenka's and Trump's beliefs in relation to foreign-policy leadership separately, comparatively between the two and in the context of other diverse world leaders: Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin, Tony Blair, Xi Jinping and George W. Bush. Finally, the *Conclusions and Discussion* section summarises the outcomes of the conducted analysis, provides conclusions that follow from it, as well as draws attention to those aspects that have not been covered to offer recommendations for further research.

This thesis demonstrates that both Trump and Lukašenka have at least relatively defined and consistent operational codes and argues that the incumbent presidents of Belarus and the US do not hold their domestic strongmanship at the foreign level. Even in those instances where the presidents aim to manifest toughness, they still leave space for cooperation with the counterparts. It is notable that Trump appears more inconsistent and harsh in his statements which may be attributed to the system he operates in. As a leader of the democratic state, he aims to satisfy as many potential voters as possible, while as a leader of the superpower, he is able to apply more radical means without the necessity to satisfy the demands of international players. In Lukašenka's case, heading the authoritarian system allows him to remain more consistent in what he states as there are virtually no domestic restraints to it; however, as his regime significantly depends on the financial support from abroad, he still has to adapt his rhetoric to satisfy those international parties which provide the assistance. Overall, the operational codes of both Lukašenka and Trump appear rather similar to each other and comparable to those of autocratic and democratic leaders across the world. The considered leaders exhibit mixed degrees of variability when speaking about Russia and China, yet their overviews of those states have remained similar over the latest years of their government. In general, the study reveals that neither Trump nor Lukašenka has experienced drastic shifts in their beliefs, yet during certain time periods they manifested different views and individual aspects of their belief systems appeared more fluctuant than the other ones. Further, this dissertation uncovers all these findings in greater details.

I. Premises Setup

1.1 Uncovering Strongmanship

1.1.1 Definition

While numerous terms exist to describe leaders operating in the framework of an autocratic rule, this dissertation chooses to build around 'strongmanship' and 'strongman'. Mostly used in media rather than academic literature, these terms remain vague though precisely fitting into the context of this paper if defined with scrutiny. According to Dittmer (2018), Liu (2018), Ordoñez and Borja (2018), Rowland (2018), Sautman (1992) and Sidel (2005), one may refer to a leader as a 'strongman' if s/he adheres to an autocratic style of governing and extensively uses populist rhetoric to emphasise his/her presumable power. In that sense, a strongman becomes at least partially synonymous to a 'charismatic leader' who is willing to exercise force and ''get things done' in the wake of democratic dysfunction' (Dittmer, 2018, p. 4). This is a relatively modern and widespread conceptualisation of strongmanship, which yet needs further elaboration and critical deconstruction to be applied to this research.

Hence, multiple aspects remain unclear from the given phrasing. The first point of debate is whether a leader needs to operate in an authoritarian political system to be classified as a 'strongman'. This dissertation goes in line with the arguments by Ordoñez and Borja (2018) and Dittmer (2018) that it should not be the requirement. On the contrary, it justifies the use of the term 'strongman' instead of e.g. an 'autocrat' or a 'dictator' exactly for the reason that it does not necessarily bear an inalienable connection with a non-democratic *system*, focusing on an *individual* instead. Thus, strongmen can be democratically elected or replaced whereas 'strongmanship' lays in their traits and behaviour. Several examples of such leaders include Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and Viktor Orbán in Hungary (Beinart, 2019; Dittmer, 2018). The other issue which remains unclear is whether the force associated with a strongman rule should be actual or presumable. For instance, several dictionary definitions—such as from Collins (2020), Cambridge (2020) and Merriam-Webster (2020)—either claim or imply the former, whereas the previously cited scholarly papers do not require one to possess hard power *per se*, but rather the inclination to introduce it. As the latter set of literature rests on a well-established political analysis, this research chooses to go with more relaxed criteria in terms of the actual power possession. The issue of force exercise, however, becomes an important point of interest for the results and discussion sections.

There are also a number of relevant observations and concerns that prompt to include other traits to the definition of strongmanship that would fit this research. For example, Trump is likely the first US president since Andrew Jackson who's demeanour and rhetoric resemble those of a strongman (MacWilliams, 2016, p. 720). It hence brings the concept of 'Jacksonianism' and its features to the discussion of strongmanship, as well as applicability of this term to the broader context of global politics. The next paragraph dedicates additional attention to this term and its aspects. Moreover, as this study focuses on the operational code analysis, those features that get attributed to a strongman-rule as a part of this method should be included in the definition of the latter concept. Therefore, this subsection further expands on the relevant aspects of the operational code doctrines as well.

Perhaps the most elaborate and influential definition of Jacksonianism appears in Walter Russell Mead's book (Mead, 2001) and subsequent article (Mead, 2017) that distinguish four principal schools of thought which shape the American foreign policy (Dimitrova, 2017, p. 13). Mead (2017, p. 2) argues that Jacksonianism is a 'large populist school' of thought where providing 'physical security and the economic well-being of the American people' is a central principle. The ideology of Jacksonianism builds largely on a rejection of cosmopolitan elites, hence trying to appeal to the poorer and less educated working-class population (Mead, 2001, 2017). It is debatable whether Jacksonianism, at least in principle, aims to protect civil liberties. On the one hand, hardline measures it employs are often argued to protect freedom and prosperity of the given population (Clarke & Ricketts, 2017, p. 368-369). On the other hand, such measures in themselves limit basic political liberties by imposing a universal form of ideology and rule (Clarke & Ricketts, 2017, p. 369). One could hence potentially consider Jacksonianism within the framework of Isaiah Berlin's (1958, p. 1) 'positive' and 'negative' liberty, and particularly its distortion where authoritarian leaders abuse the notion of the first one to promote their ideology under the pretext of improving population's genuine freedom. This dissertation includes the features of Jacksonianism considered above to its definition of strongmanship and later illustrates that despite initially being an American political term, its principles equally apply to various strongmen across the globe.

As for the features of strongmanship related to the operational code analysis, these mostly concern the level of control that a leader believes to possess over the historical development and, to a lesser extent, the utility of means that one employs to achieve their goals. Hence, in their comparative analysis of the Chinese General Secretaries—Xi Jinping and Hu Jintao—

He and Feng (2013) argue that those 'leaders who have a strong belief in historical control […] are likely to be decisive, strong decision-makers' (p. 222), whereas those with low sense of control are likely to be weak and indecisive. The utility of means may define a strongman in a way that '[t]op leaders are more likely to behave in a decisive or conflictual way, e.g. using punishments, whereas subordinate leaders may incline towards a cooperative way, e.g. using appeals and rewards, to achieve their goals' (He & Feng, 2013, pp. 226-227). A strongman leader would hence have—or manifest the possession of—a strong sense of control over the historical development and an inclination to act decisively, using radical means to achieve their goals and expectations.

This research combines the features of all the aforementioned notions to deduce the following definitions of strongmanship and therefore, a strongman. A strongman is a *charismatic leader* who aims to adopt an *autocratic style* of governing and extensively *uses populist rhetoric* to appeal mostly *unprivileged groups* of population with their supposedly *anti-establishment, conservative and hardline image*, who possesses *strong sense of control over historical development* and either adopts or claims to adopt *radical, forceful means* of action in their policy negotiation. Strongmanship does not necessarily depend or follow from a given political system, but rather defines political actors themselves. This dissertation applies this definition to the further analysis and in line with its major objective, attempts to relate this notion to the concept of operational code which is also defined later.

1.1.2 Behaviour and Personality Traits

Whether the behaviour of political strongmen has a significant correlation with their personal traits is still an open question, yet multiple studies suggest, at either empirical or theoretical level, that this should be the case. Thus, one of the most prominent theories holds that there is a link between an autocratic behaviour and the Big Five personality traits, as well as between the so-called 'Dark Triad' of personal classification (Nai & Toros, 2020, p. 4). In a broad psychological analysis, the Big Five theory—that is also often called the five-factor model of personality—aims to connect a set of five personal traits to the personality construction (see e.g. Sheldon et al, 1997; Judge et al, 1999; Komarraju et al, 2011). These traits are *openness* (foremost, to new experiences, practices, and criticism); *conscientiousness* (ability to structure actions responsibly and consistently); *extraversion* (willingness to socialise, attract favourable attitude); *agreeableness* (desire to seek cooperation and avoid conflicts); and *neuroticism* (emotional stability or the lack of it) (Krueger et al, 2012; DeYoung et al, 2016).

The theory linking the Big Five traits to authoritarian politics holds that illiberal actors should score low on the corresponding measuring scale (Nai & Toros, 2020, p. 4). Indeed, as the definition of a strongman adopted in this thesis suggests, the Big Five qualities of such leaders are supposed to be on the negative side of the spectrum. Strongmen are supposed to prefer firm and radical ways of action to cooperative ones and proceed with populist rhetoric which discourages conscientiousness, they are not necessarily emotionally stable, as well as pretend to be the sole masters of all their actions. The only feature of the Big Five that a strongman is supposed to possess is extraversion as their success depends on a charismatic behaviour. In this context, the 'Dark Triad' traits mentioned in the previous paragraph appear useful. According to Furnham et al (2013, as cited in Nai & Toros, 2020, p. 4), these traits are exactly on the adverse side of the Big Five qualities, representing such features as narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. These are the traits one is supposed to be more likely finding among strongman leaders as they correspond to an egocentric and harsh style of governing.

Multiple studies indeed found correlation between, for example, low openness, agreeableness, the Dark Triad features and power obsession, social dominance, as well as inclination to join far-right movements and radical groups (see Heaven & Bucci, 2001; Hodson et al, 2009; Jones, 2013; Jones & Figueredo, 2013). The study which is most relevant to this dissertation discovered a significant association between low agreeableness, low neuroticism, high extraversion and the behaviour of fourteen 'political leaders with autocratic tendencies' (Nai & Toros, 2020, p. 5). Contrary to the pre-existing findings, Nai and Toros (2020, pp. 13-14) did not register a significant difference between openness and conscientiousness of autocrats and non-autocrats. It is not clear why this was the case, however, the assumption was that these two qualities mattered more for acquiring and maintaining political leadership as such—regardless of the political system or leadership style (Nai & Toros, 2020, p. 16). Despite there was no one universal psychological portrait of the considered leaders, all strongmen scored significantly higher than liberal leaders in the Dark Triad traits (Nai & Toros, 2020, p. 15). The link was particularly strong with psychopathy (Nai & Toros, 2020, pp. 14, 16). Most notably for this dissertation, Nai and Toros's analysis (2020, p. 16) revealed that the US president Donald Trump 'consistently [diverged] even from the baseline of autocrats' average profile': he manifested unprecedentedly low agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism with high extraversion, narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. Subsection 1.4 of this thesis examines what is known about Trump's personality in more details as the findings of this subsection offer a comprehensive overview of strongman behaviour and traits in general.

1.2 Operational Code

1.2.1 Definition and History

While the introduction section has briefly discussed the notions of operational code and its analysis, this part of the dissertation adds the required scrutiny to these concepts which are the crucial part of this research as a whole. The definition of the operational code itself usually sources from the original study by Leites (1951), as well as from those by Converse (1964), George (1969) and Walker et al (1998). The one that is commonly agreed to be a universal definition is George's (1969, p. 197) one: it sees the operational code as a system of 'beliefs about the nature of politics and political conflict, […] views regarding the extent to which historical developments can be shaped, and […] notions of correct strategies and tactics'. Earlier, Converse (1964, p. 207) argued that a belief system is 'a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence', making his operationalisation significantly broader and less elaborate than George's (1969) one. As for the operational code analysis, it is defined in Walker et al (2003, p. 216) as 'an approach to the study of political leaders that may focus narrowly on a set of political beliefs or more broadly on a set of beliefs embedded in the personality of a leader or originating from the cultural matrix of a society'. This method of understanding political actors hence aims to draw conclusions and predictions regarding their behaviour based on personal characteristics and beliefs of these actors.

Particular ways of measurement and deconstruction of the operational code have been evolving since the concept had been introduced: from a highly vague speculative approach (see Leites, 1951) towards a computer-based coding method on the verge of quantitative and qualitative analyses (see e.g. Walker et al, 2003). Until the end of the 1970s, the best strategy towards the OC analysis consisted in answering ten questions by Alexander George (1969) that aimed to uncover *philosophical* and *instrumental* beliefs of political leaders. Table 1 presents these questions in their original phrasing, although certain studies transform them slightly. In 1977, Ole Holsti (1977) attempted to systematise answers to those questions and created the typology of political leaders. He deduced six types of the operational code belief systems that are visible from Table 2 in the form revised by Walker et al (2003, p. 220)[2].

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[2] The revision merges types D, E, and F in one quadrant as the nature of such belief systems is essentially the same—pessimistic view of conflict—although the particular premises differ (Walker et al, 2003, p. 219).

Table 1. Operational Code Questions as Developed by George (1969)

Philosophical Questions	Instrumental Questions
1. What is the 'essential' nature of political life? Is the political universe one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?	1. What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?
2. What are the prospects for the eventual realisation of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic or must one be pessimistic on this score, and in what respects the one and/or the other?	2. How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?
3. Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?	3. How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?
4. How much 'control' or 'mastery' can one have over historical development? What is one's role in 'moving' and 'shaping' history in the desired direction?	4. What is the best 'timing' of action to advance one's interests?
5. What is the role of 'chance' in human affairs and in historical development?	5. What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one's interest?

Source: George (1969, pp. 201-216)

Unfortunately, however, the entire approach coined by George (1969) and Holsti (1977) suffered from a significant idealistic bias fostered by cognitive consistency theory (Walker et al, 2003, p. 217). Both scholars have assumed that leaders' instrumental and philosophical beliefs have been consistent with each other, that leaders' beliefs were consistent with their decisions and overall, that those beliefs were virtually fixed for life. For Holsti (1977, p. 156), the answer to George's (1969) P-1 question also formed a so-called 'master belief'. Therefore, what a political actor thought of the nature of political life would determine what were their prospects for realisation of fundamental values, views on predictability of political future, control over historical development and the role of chance (Holsti, 1977, p. 156-157). This chain of philosophical beliefs, in turn, would define all the instrumental ones (Holsti, 1977, p. 157). Holsti (1977) put exactly this logic into creation of the typology discussed in the previous paragraph: what a leader thought of a conflict defined what it meant for their political perception and strategy of addressing the arising challenges.

<center>Table 2. Operational Code Typologies as Developed by Holsti (1977)</center>

TYPE A	**TYPE C**
Conflict is temporary, caused by human misunderstanding and miscommunication. A 'conflict spiral', based upon misperception and impulsive responses, is the major danger of war. Opponents are often influenced by non-rational conditions, but tend to respond in kind to conciliation and firmness. Optimism is warranted, based upon a leader's ability and willingness to shape historical development. The future is relatively predictable, and control over it is possible.	Conflict is temporary; it is possible to restructure the state system to reflect the latent harmony of interests. The source of conflict is the anarchical state system, which permits a variety of causes to produce war. Opponents vary in nature, goals, and responses to conciliation and firmness. One should be pessimistic about goals unless the state system is changed, because predictability and control over historical development is low under anarchy.
Establish goals within a framework that emphasises shared interest. Pursue broadly international goals incrementally with flexible strategies that control risks by avoiding escalation and acting quickly when conciliation opportunities arise. Emphasise resources that establish a climate for negotiation and compromise and avoid the early use of force.	Establish optimal goals vigorously within a comprehensive framework. Pursue shared goals, but control risks by limiting means rather than ends. Act quickly when conciliation opportunities arise and delay escalatory actions whenever possible; other resources than military capabilities are useful.
TYPE DEF	**TYPE B**
Conflict is permanent, caused by human nature (D), nationalism (E) or international anarchy (F). Power disequilibria are major dangers of war. Opponents may vary, and responses to conciliation or firmness are uncertain. Optimism declines over the long run and in the short run depends upon the quality of leadership and a power equilibrium. Predictability is limited, as is control over historical development.	Conflict is temporary, caused by warlike states; miscalculation and appeasement are the major causes of war. Opponents are rational and can be deterred. Optimism is warranted regarding realisation of goals. The political future is relatively predictable, and control over historical development is possible.
Seek limited goals flexibly with moderate means. Use military force if the opponent and circumstances require it, but only as a final resource.	One should seek optimal goals vigorously within a comprehensive framework. Control risks by limiting means rather than ends. Any tactic and resource may be appropriate, including the use of force when it offers prospects for large gains with limited risk.

Source: Walker et al (2003, p. 220)

While these arguments have been speculative in the first place, numerous studies of various political leaders later provided their empirical refutation. In particular, it became clear that beliefs of political actors change over time and in that way, they are not just passive observers of the system around them—as initially assumed—but rather active participants, reacting accordingly to the environment. One may find evidence supporting this claim in, for instance,

Schafer and Crichlow (2000), Renshon (2008), Walker et al (1998). A number of authors called the phenomenon of leaders' beliefs change 'learning', and distinguished its various levels. For instance, Tetlock (1991), Levy (1994) and Malici (2011) speak about simple, diagnostic and complex learning. The first one is a change in instrumental beliefs that implies transformation of means selection; the second one is a change in philosophical beliefs that transforms the perception of the political environment (Malici, 2011, p. 158). As for the complex learning, Malici (2011, p. 159) argues that it occurs when both sets of beliefs change to transform strategic preferences. Vitaly, the study by Renshon (2008, p. 827), as well as the researches by Walker, Schafer and Young (1998, 1999, as cited in Walker et al 2003, p. 221) discovered that the philosophical beliefs tended to be more volatile, whereas the instrumental beliefs were often embedded into the value system—hence permanent. This makes diagnostic learning more likely to occur than the other types. All these findings are highly useful for this analysis as it aims to follow the consistency of Lukašenka's and Trump's operational codes. The concluding section also explains how the findings of this research potentially challenge the last argument with regards to learning.

Despite the operational code approach is extensively developed and well-known within the academic field, the number of empirical studies that adopt this analytical method is still low and unambiguous evidence to prove the mechanisms of its functioning are lacking. For instance, Walker et al (1999) revealed that the US presidents Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush experienced significant OC learning during their terms and their foreign policies were generally consistent with those transformations, yet the costs of decision-making had a significant impact on their manifested beliefs. On the other hand, Dyson and Parent (2018) and Forsberg and Pursiainen (2017)—who analysed Russia's president Vladimir Putin—confirmed that his operational code has remained relatively consistent over time and less dependent on the external factors, such as geopolitical context. Since Putin, Bush and Clinton operated in different political systems, it suggests that in addition to leaders' personal traits, such factors as a country's political system or culture could influence the outlook of the operational code. At the same time, geographical and political diversity of the leaders considered within the framework of the OC analysis is rather slim as the existing studies usually focus on the Western leaders of consequently democratic states. It leaves numerous gaps in the operational code analysis and hampers representativeness of the existing knowledge. This research hence aims to contribute with a comparative study of leaders operating in different political and cultural systems, as well as geographical locations.

1.2.2 Operational Code of Strongmen

Since the focus of this operational code analysis is strongman politics in different political settings, it would be worth looking at the other studies which adopt this methodology to similar research questions. Unfortunately, no studies exist that would compare operational codes of strongman leaders who are supposedly similar in character and style yet come from democracies and autocracies. At the same time, there are plenty of single-case and comparative studies that examine operational codes of those leaders that operate in formally authoritarian systems. This subsection discusses those studies to use their experience and later compare their findings to those of this dissertation.

The major conclusions which source from the aggregated analysis of those studies concerning the operational code of autocratic leaders is that there is no single profile which applies to all of them, as well as their operational codes might turn out being different from those logically expected. For instance, Malici and Malici's (2005, pp. 398, 401) comparative analysis of two highly odious strongmen—Fidel Castro and Kim Il Sung—proved that both leaders manifested significantly different sense of control over historical development than politicians from a norming group—the latter consisted of thirty diverse state leaders. However, this difference was in the unexpected direction with both Kim and Castro scoring lower on this scale (Malici & Malici, 2005, p. 401). Both were also inclined to reward beyond the mean of the norming group (Malici & Malici, 2005, p. 401). It is logical in Castro's case as his profile built notably on 'hidalgo generosity' (Sondrol, 1991, p. 609), but with Kim, this trait was less anticipated. At the same time, the considered leaders differed significantly between each other in their perception of political universe and strategic approach to it: Kim was either as likely or more likely to cooperate as the norming group, while Castro was drastically less likely to do so (Malici & Malici, 2005, p. 401). Overall, Castro professed a way more conflictual approach to his means and views than Kim (Malici & Malici, 2005, p. 406). Finally, the considered research revealed that while the beliefs of both leaders were expected to transform in light of the Cold War, the only one to learn and hence experience significant transformation of the OC over this period was Fidel Castro (Malici & Malici, 2005, pp. 403-404). Although even his learning was moderate as Kim Il Sung did not 'learn' at all (Malici & Malici, 2005, p. 404). These findings indicate that even the most autocratic governors can possess operational codes which differ drastically between each other and compare unpredictably to the average value scores, while the extent or existence of learning depends on a particular individual.

Further evidence to confirm variability among autocrats themselves and their difference from democrats or norming groups exist in the comprehensive study of Russia's president Vladimir Putin. This research by Dyson and Parent (2018) applies operational code analysis to more than one million words which Putin has said since 1999. In most aspects, Putin was found to resemble a typical contemporary leader of great power (Dyson & Parent, 2018, p. 89). Same as the previously considered Kim and Castro, Putin would not choose to punish and reward significantly more or less often than those leaders he compares to most (Dyson & Parent, 2018, p. 89). The largest deviations were in Putin's sense of control over historical development and risk aversion: the former was 1.3 times higher than the average (Dyson & Parent, 2018, p. 89). Interestingly, Putin's sense of control has looked rather stable across the years of his rule, yet it dropped to the all-time low a year after the annexation of Crimea (Dyson & Parent, 2018, p. 89). In light of the Ukrainian crisis, significant transformation occurred in his perception of NATO and the West in general: he still perceived the overall nature of political universe as cooperative, yet hostility arose to those actors who did not support his actions in the neighbouring state (Dyson & Parent, 2018, p. 94). This lead Dyson and Parent (2018, p. 94) to conclude that Putin's OC was the one of an opportunist and its multiple aspects did not depend on the grand strategic orientation. The presented findings suggest that autocratic leaders—as perhaps democratic ones, too—may have largely predefined beliefs as well as opportunistic ones. This variance serves as a useful concept for further investigation in this thesis.

Finally, the relevant data for this overview of strongmen's operational code comes from the studies of China's General Secretaries. The already mentioned study by He and Feng (2013) discovered that the incumbent General Secretary Xi Jinping and his predecessor Hu Jintao had generally similar operational codes but still differed in the key aspects of it. In particular, Xi held less optimistic views of the political universe and seemed to be more conflictual in the means he chose to address it (He & Feng, 2013, p. 229). At the same time, his sense of control over historical development was significantly lower than Hu's, same as his inclination to punish the opponents (He & Feng, 2013, p. 225). As for the latter though, it is vital to understand that the difference was in the mean scores: Hu has experienced an extreme learning from his first term to the second, as a result of which his inclination to punish dropped more than nine times—to the level of Xi's mean score (He & Feng, 2013, p. 228). The findings of this research illustrate that even those leaders who operate in the same state and system, as well as during similar time period, may manifest highly diverse beliefs and change them over the course of their rule. In this light, looking at leaders as different from each other in terms

of the surrounding political system as Lukašenka and Trump is particularly interesting. In principle, discrepancy in their beliefs should be drastic, however, if proved to be otherwise, it would provide evidence to suggest that there are aspects more important in defining a leader's operational code than a political system, but indeed their personal traits. The next subsections therefore introduce the subjects of this research before proceeding with their OC analysis.

1.3 The Last Dictator in Europe

Being in power for longer than any other incumbent post-Soviet leader[3] and capturing the country's entire political agenda to himself, Aliaksandr Lukašenka has been the central figure of the Belarusian studies since 1994. Numerous books and articles tried to uncover the biography and character of the 'the last dictator in Europe'—the term which over the years has become a cliché. Only a minor selection of works dedicated to Lukašenka's life and rule includes those by Wilson (2011), Bennett (2011), Ioffe (2014), Marples, (2014), Frear (2018). At the same time, the president himself has always been selective on which biographical details to share with public and media, while the state agencies have been working to secure these bits from unapproved disclosure. In addition to the verifiable information about Lukašenka, it hence generated a significant number of rumours concerning his personal life and traits. Before adding to this corpus of information, this research aims to consider as many relevant sources as possible to uncover what the previously published literature tells about Lukašenka, paying attention to both confirmed and unconfirmed reports.

One may find a comprehensive investigation of what Anastasiya Astapova (2016, p. 32) calls Lukašenka's 'official and folk biographies' in her article for *Journal of Folklore Research*. It discovers that various groups of president's supporters and opponents have been continuously framing certain aspects of his life path to establish different character profiles. The official biographies, hence, would often describe Lukašenka as a 'father of his people' who is yet an 'ordinary person' from the village, meaning that he possesses an authority to head the state and knows exactly how to do it, but still represents its supposedly prevalent population group (Astapova, 2016, pp. 42-43). Astapova (2016, p. 43) notes that this is a common description

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[3] The Tajik president Emomali Rahmon has only been an acting president until November 1994, while Lukashenka has been officially inaugurated in July 1994 (Menga, 2018). Hence technically, Lukašenka *is* the longest-serving president in the post-Soviet space, but it depends on the inclusion criteria. For example, Nursultan Nazarbayev has ruled Kazakhstan since 1989, resigned in 2019, but is believed to still keep power on the position of Chairman of the Security Council (Isaacs, 2020).

of authoritarian leaders in general, notably of Stalin, who appeared different yet similar to common people in his official biographies to emphasise 'uniqueness' of the ruling personality (also see Skradol, 2009, p. 31). Therefore, Lukašenka's strongmanship is embedded in this official biographical representation and, in this case, supposed to attract the reader.

On the other hand, oppositional biographies depict Belarus' president as a weak politician and antisocial person, attributing it to his mental insanity. For instance, the rumour spread by a doctor presumably close to Lukašenka holds that he was once diagnosed with 'mosaic psychopathy' (Astapova, 2016, p. 33). The other arguments stress his propensity to lies, most notably about his personal life, where he appears to provide different stories at different times (Astapova, 2016, pp. 33-36). For instance, Karbalevich (2010, p. 8) writes that Lukašenka initially claimed that his parents divorced when he was a child but the other time, that his father died at war—presumably WWII, despite Lukašenka was born nine years after it ended. Whether the president indeed claimed the latter is impossible to confirm as there are no reliable sources that would provide an original quote, however, there is little doubt among independent Belarusian journalists that this is a true statement which the secret services just hide (Astapova, 2016, p. 36). Lukašenka also changed his opinion about Adolf Hitler at least three times to later refute this self-contradiction as a fake distributed from Poland (Bennett, 2011, p. 280). One of the recent examples of Lukašenka publicly lying to manifest his powerful position is a claim that Elon Musk has gifted him an electric car that his company produces—*Tesla*, which was later refuted by Musk himself (BBC, 2019). In relation to this research, the confirmed inconsistency and mendacity in Lukašenka's words—regardless of the underlying reasons—suggests that he might be prone to switch his beliefs or their representation.

Despite Lukašenka is indeed the focus of most works on the Belarusian politics, precisely his belief system, let alone 'operational code', has never been investigated in a peer-reviewed paper or any other kind of a scientifically planned study. All existing assessments concerning his view of the political universe and means of addressing it source either from media opinion articles or researches that lack methodological precision—for example, biographies and general works mentioned in the previous paragraph (see Wilson, 2011; Bennett, 2011). Although not an exception but at least a notable mention is the book by Valery Karbalevich (2010) titled *Aleksandr Lukashenko: Political Portrait*. As Kłysiński (2011, p. 177) notes, this is the first biography to offer 'such a deep, reliable and extensive analysis of [Lukašenka's] life, his personality formation and how these all relate to his policies'. Karbalevich (2010) reveals that

in domestic policy, Lukašenka aims to control its every single aspect, regardless of whether it is in line with his duties or area of expertise. His foreign policy yet appears more versatile as the president manoeuvres between Russia and the West (Karbalevich, 2010). It suggests, in line with the assumptions of this thesis, that representation of strongmen may be different domestically and internationally. At the same time, Lukašenka's profile has not changed over the course of his presidency and his fundamental beliefs have remained unaffected by the arising constrains at all levels (Karbalevich, 2010). Although these findings uncover at least limited features of Lukašenka's belief system, they remain speculative, suffering from a lack of precision and support by a statistical analysis. Moreover, published in 2010, Karbalevich's (2010) book is already outdated. This dissertation aims to fill in the existing research gaps by addressing Lukašenka's beliefs quantitatively and during the most recent timeframe.

1.4 Real Estate Mogul of the People

In contrast to Lukašenka in Belarus, Donald J. Trump has been heading the United States for less than one four-year term, with the hope of embarking on the second one next year. However, as a son of a famous New York businessman and later an eccentric public figure himself, Trump's personal traits and biographical features have been a focus of public attention since the president's early age. His beliefs and behaviour have continuously been linked to conservatism and supposed strongmanship. For example, he already attracted such criticism in 1989 after commenting on the Central Park jogger case: Trump then called for the introduction of death penalty in New York to punish five black teenagers falsely accused of rape and assault (Chancer, 2005, p. 40). Media outlets and scholarly researches also linked Trump to extreme narcissism (see e.g. Amernic & Craig, 2010; Alford, 2015; Shurden, 2014). Jeffrey Kluger—a senior writer of *Time* magazine—wrote in his book that '[to] call Donald Trump a narcissist is to state what seems clinically obvious. There is the egotism of narcissism, the grandiosity of narcissism, the social obtuseness of narcissism' (Kluger, 2014, p. 2). Evidently, those assessments are relevant to this dissertation, however, they are largely subjective and cover only the period prior to when Trump announced his 2016 presidency bid. This section hence further discusses what has become known of Trump's belief system and character with the start of his political career[4] to relate it to the primary findings of this research.

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[4] Meaning the mid-2010s. Trump first tried to run for president as a Reform Party nominee in 2000, yet this campaign was brief and rather unserious (Jelen, 2001, p. 1).

Similarly to Lukašenka, Trump's personality has been a subject to controversial assessments and highly polar interpretations coming from supporters and opponents. In the article titled exactly in line with this discrepancy—*Donald Trump: Narcissist, Psychopath or Representative of the People?*—Anton Ashcroft (2016) aims to unfold the psychological type of then presidential candidate based on the information known about his actions and beliefs. Ashcroft (2016, p. 217) explains that individuals with different attitude to Trump tend to interpret virtually the same actions of him as signs of different character: for instance, Trump's opponents see his inconsistent and grandiose rhetoric as the manifestation of psychopathy and narcissism[5], whereas Trump's supporters perceive this kind of behaviour as the one of a charismatic and strong leader, 'straight-talking representative of the people'. Again, same as in Lukašenka's case, numerous authors emphasise Trump's tendency to consistent lies, radical and unfounded statements, as well as their subsequent denial[6] (see e.g. Buchanan, 2016; Holan & Qiu, 2015; Manhire, 2016, as cited in Ashcroft, 2016). This does not only suggest that the two leaders selected for this research are well-fit comparative cases, however, also that they are highly useful for the strongmanship analysis in general. Such an eccentric behaviour and its polarised interpretation offers a peculiar insight into populist leveraging and opportunism.

What is crucial for this dissertation is that considering multiple features of Trump's personality, Ashcroft (2016, p. 219) concluded that should he become president, he would indeed be a strongman. In principle, Trump finds it easy to abuse power; tends to ignore the advisory recommendations and prefers to be surrounded by yes men; his reactions to threats are usually strong and violent, while inconsistent due to his impulsiveness; as well as he does not hesitate to lie and make false promises to manifest his power and control over a situation (Ashcroft, 2016, p. 219). Similar conclusions can also be drawn from the other reports on Trump's behaviour during and prior to the presidential campaign which Ashcroft (2016) quotes: for example by Berrien (2016), David (2016), North (2016), Stein and Liebelson (2016), Timm (2016), and Thompson (2016) (as cited in Ashcroft, 2016). The primary issue with these predictions—as by their nature it is with virtually all kind of predictions—is that they could not take into account the actual decisions that Trump would make as president, let alone how dif-

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[5] While these two notions overlap in a large number of characteristics, their fundamental difference is that a psychopath would usually behave in a calculated way and not care about public opinion, while a narcissist would be absent-minded and hold praise for intrinsic value (Millon & Davis, 2000, p. 65).

[6] Both famously attracted criticism for doing that in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Dixon, 2020; McCarthy, 2020).

ferent they would be on domestic and foreign levels. This research aims to fill in precisely this gap and reveal whether a seemingly perfect strongman—judging by his past performance and presidential campaign—indeed turned out being the one upon accessing power.

A highly limited number of works exist that look at the operational code of Donald Trump as a presidential candidate and immediately after acquiring power. The first study is a brief one by Swinkels (2017): it only looks at two George's (1969) questions regarding the nature of political life and nature of strategic approach. Its findings indicate that a conflict-based approach that Trump seemed to manifest during his campaign has turned out being more consensus-seeking upon the start of his presidency (Swinkels, 2017, p. 30). If indeed so, it could characterise Trump as less of a strongman than initially expected. A more substantial research by Walker et al (2018) considered the candidate Trump as opposed to his election rival Hilary Clinton. Trump was confirmed to be significantly more conflict-oriented, mistrustful and controlling leader (Walker et al, 2018, p. 15). Simultaneously, both candidates deviated from the profile of a typical US president, yet proved to be rather similar to the average world leaders (Walker et al, 2018, p. 15). Notably, Trump's sense of control of historical development was 'more than one standard deviation higher' than that of an average US president, with a significantly higher tendency to punish or threaten the opponents, as well as generally more conflictual profile than that of 'over 90 [percent] of US presidents' (Walker et al, 2018, p. 14). All those findings provide a useful insight into Trump's personality, confirming his strongman inclinations. The problem with both reviewed studies, however, is that they either cover Trump's beliefs prior to the beginning of his presidency or offer a shallow insight into the different aspects of his operational code. Moreover, both papers concern a highly limited timeframe, failing to address the learning processes at a longer term. Their findings thus do not allow to make conclusions regarding president Trump's operational code and consistency of his beliefs. This is exactly the gap which this dissertation aims to fill in further.

II. Approach to Analysis

2.1 Justification

After introducing separate concepts of the operational code analysis and strongmanship in the previous section, the issue which remains unclear is why precisely this dissertation chose the former to investigate the latter. The broad reason is that the OC approach offers a well-structured framework of political psychology analysis which is coherent for those without in-depth knowledge of psychological processes: there is a pre-developed system of indices and their decoding. As for the more specific advantages of using exactly this approach, there are three of them. Firstly, this method is relatively unbiased and deprived of significant subjectivity constrains. While its methodology is still human-developed, what is produced in the end are indices which depend on mathematical calculations. Indeed, getting the final results require qualitative interpretation of these indices, however their quantitative basis allows to bypass such level of subjectivity as with unstructured assessment of words and phrases. Secondly, there are certain indices within the OC analysis framework that reflect well on the aspects of strongmanship which this dissertation aims to uncover. As the definition section has already mentioned, the P-4 index allows to check how important leaders see themselves in the international system and how much control they think to possess over its development. The fundamental operational code indices: P-1, P-2, I-1, I-2, as well as I-5 index, offer an insight into such aspects of the Big Five traits as agreeableness and extraversion since they consider how cooperative or conflictual leaders are. Moreover, since the operational code focuses on the foreign policy aspects, it allows to uncover exactly what is unknown so far about Lukašenka's and Trump's leadership approach: whether they are strongmen *abroad*, while a large corpus of literature confirms their illiberal and controlling tendencies *at home*. Thirdly, due to the statistical and mathematical nature of the OC approach, it serves as a trackable and replicable method of beliefs analysis. It allows further researches to check the findings of this one and to use the results in their own samples, as well as to relate it to the previous studies.

2.2 Verbs in Context System (VICS)

In line with all operational code researches, this dissertation adopts Verbs in Context System (VICS) of analysis. Developed by Walker et al (1998) and based on the the works of George (1969) and Holsti (1970), this is a quantitative method of analysis which calculates indices.

The first set of numerical values produced concerns the first part of the operational code as defined by George (1969)—philosophical characteristics of leaders' beliefs representing their geopolitical perception of 'self' and 'other' (Walker et al, 1998, p. 183). There are hence five P indices, each denoting a separate philosophical trait. Diagnostic propensity of P-1 is the nature of political universe; P-2 is realisation of politics values; P-3 is predictability of political future; P-4 is control over historical development; P-5 is the role of chance (Walker et al, 2003, p. 238). To reflect on the other part of George's (1969) definition, the second set of VICS indices produces values to measure individuals' power manifestations and the ways of dealing with the political structure, or 'instrumental beliefs' (Walker et al, 1998, p. 183). The choice and shift propensity of I-1 is strategic approach to goals; I-2 is tactical pursuit of goals; I-3 is risk orientation; I-4 is timing of action; and I-5 is utility of means (Walker et al, 2003, p. 238).

In order to produce values for all the indices mentioned above, VICS codes phrases and sentences to mark them either as cooperative or conflictual, friendly or hostile, positive or negative based on the contained verbs (Walker et al, 1998, p. 181). P-1, P-2, I-1, and I-2 are coded from –1 to +1, measured by assigning higher and lower scores to particular verbs. Thus, 'punish' is –3; 'threaten' is –2; 'oppose' is –1; 'support' is +1; 'promise' is +2; 'reward' is +3 (Walker et al, 1998, p. 180). The other indices are derived from the same values and coded from 0 to 1. All indices have their decoding schemes that are visible from Table 3 beneath.

Table 3. Operational Code Indices Decoding Scheme

Index	Meaning	Decoding
P-1	*Nature of Political Universe*	From **Hostile** (–) to **Friendly** (+) **–1** (extremely) | **–0.75** (very) | **–0.50** (definitely) | **–0.25** (somewhat) | **0** (mixed) | **+0.25** (somewhat) | **+0.50** (definitely) | **+0.75** (very) | **+1** (extremely)
I-1	*Strategic Approach to Goals*	From **Conflict** (–) to **Cooperation** (+) **–1** (extremely) | **–0.75** (very) | **–0.50** (definitely) | **–0.25** (somewhat) | **0** (mixed) | **+0.25** (somewhat) | **+0.50** (definitely) | **+0.75** (very) | **+1** (extremely)
P-2	*Realisation of Political Values*	From **Pessimism** (–) to **Optimism** (+) **–1** (extremely) | **–0.75** (very) | **–0.50** (definitely) | **–0.25** (somewhat) | **0** (mixed) | **+0.25** (somewhat) | **+0.50** (definitely) | **+0.75** (very) | **+1** (extremely)

Index	Meaning	Decoding
I-2	*Tactical Pursuit of Goals*	From **Conflict** (–) to **Cooperation** (+) **–1** (extremely) | **–0.75** (very) | **–0.50** (definitely) | **–0.25** (somewhat) | **0** (mixed) | **+0.25** (somewhat) | **+0.50** (definitely) | **+0.75** (very) | **+1** (extremely)
P-4	*Control Over Historical Development*	Degree of Control **0** (Very Low) | **0.25** (Low) | **0.50** (Medium) | **0.75** (High) | **1** (Very High)
I-5	*Utility of Means*	Defined by utility of Means below
a	*Punish*	Degree of Utility **0** (Very Low) | **0.08** (Low) | **0.16** (Medium) | **0.24** (High) | **0.32** (Very High)
b	*Threaten*	Degree of Utility **0** (Very Low) | **0.08** (Low) | **0.16** (Medium) | **0.24** (High) | **0.32** (Very High)
c	*Oppose*	Degree of Utility **0** (Very Low) | **0.08** (Low) | **0.16** (Medium) | **0.24** (High) | **0.32** (Very High)
d	*Appeal*	Degree of Utility **0** (Very Low) | **0.08** (Low) | **0.16** (Medium) | **0.24** (High) | **0.32** (Very High)
e	*Promise*	Degree of Utility **0** (Very Low) | **0.08** (Low) | **0.16** (Medium) | **0.24** (High) | **0.32** (Very High)
f	*Reward*	Degree of Utility **0** (Very Low) | **0.08** (Low) | **0.16** (Medium) | **0.24** (High) | **0.32** (Very High)

Source: Walker et al (2003, pp. 227-231)

2.3 Indices Selection

Focusing on all the aforementioned aspects of operational code analysis would be infeasible for this research aiming to relate this concept to the strongmanship traits. Hence, the decision has been made to select those indices that would allow to focus exclusively on the features of interest. As previously stated in the strongmanship definition subsection, a number of studies

consider either P-4 or I-5 indices, or both of them, crucial in examining the necessary patterns of strongman behaviour. They concern sense of control over historical development and utility of means, respectively, and therefore, have made a part of this research. The other indices which this study has decided to focus on were P-1, P-2, I-1 and I-2. They assess how leaders perceive the nature of political universe and means of addressing it at a given period of time, allowing to track potential contextual impacts. These are vital for this dissertation as it hypotheses that the leaders under investigation are highly prone to external influence when making decisions and phrasing beliefs. Hence, understanding how their perception of the political universe and its management change in light of the particular events, as well as tracing them back to more strongman-specific OC features such as P-4 and I-5, would allow to make informed conclusions about how embedded are the manifested beliefs in the leaders' philosophical paradigms, whether their strongmanship—or the lack of it—depends on circumstances.

2.4 Data Sources

This dissertation has retrieved its data from the following sources. Since all Trump's public speeches, interviews and comments are accessible with transcripts and references via *factba.se* website (Factbase, 2020), it became the primary source of information in case of the US president. This resource also offers a comprehensive search tool and themes grouping, which has become particularly useful during the analysis. In order to verify the data retrieved from Factbase (2020), the primary sources have been further investigated. To analyse Trump's informal speeches, this dissertation used the data from his Twitter account (Trump [@realDonaldTrump], n.d.). Despite all Trump's tweets—even the deleted ones—have been accessible via Factbase (2020), retrieving their full text was occasionally possible only from the original source. The justification for using Twitter as such in this operational code analysis comes from Qiu's et al (2012, p. 716) research where they found that 'tweets contain[ed] valid linguistic cues to personality' and these cues '[could] be accurately judged by unknown others'. In case of Lukašenka, his speeches were not so easily accessible with the lack of full and unbiased databases. Transcripts of the vast majority of public addresses and informal meetings were available via the official website of the President of the Republic of Belarus (2020), however, interviews—even those coordinated governmentally—were often missing. Luckily, these interviews and comments were still easily accessible in some form online: often as videos or audios, allowing to confirm credibility of the provided statements. In the absence of transcripts, the researcher has produced them manually, with the help of relevant software.

Interestingly, the content of those speeches which presumably contained undesired expressions were changed or adapted at Lukašenka's official website, as well as entire speeches not published or subsequently deleted. While this obstacle has certainly hampered the research process, one should not assume that its accuracy has suffered. As the previous paragraph explains, in order to fill the gaps of edited or initially not published data, this dissertation has consulted alternative sources of information, such as independent media with video or audio footages present to validate the texts. Those speeches that have been deleted from the official website, in turn, were available either from web archive repositories or, again, independent media resources. In case of Trump, the aforementioned issues were far less prevalent to the extent of non-existent: edited speeches would usually be found only in partisan media, but not in the official or other reliable sources. When it was not possible to retrieve a non-edited speech by any means, it would not be used in the research.

2.5 Data Systematisation and Limitations

In order to make the collected data consistent and comparable, the following procedures have applied. The major challenge was a linguistic one as Lukašenka's speeches were in Russian, rarely Belarusian, or a mixture of the two, so they needed to be translated into English. As the researcher is a native speaker of Russian and Belarusian, it has been possible to produce adequate translations. For the purposes of retrieving initial translations further subjected to an extensive editing, the author used Google Translate that appeared to provide highly accurate data in the first place. The major difficulty has consisted in adapting marker verbs for VICS as their different language versions could have had multiple translations and slightly different connotations. Usually, the most common dictionary equivalents were adopted. The translation process has generally been not challenging and the past experience of other operational code researches involving the Russian-speaking politicians (Dyson, 2001; Dyson & Parent, 2018; the original work by Leites, 1951) helped developing an effective strategy.

This research has appreciated cultural and political differences in the leaders' speeches and later reflects on their impact on the analysis results in the corresponding section. The point of concern here is that the operational code analysis and VICS system mostly deal with the Western context and focus on the English-language speeches. It brings not only linguistic difficulties mentioned in the previous paragraph, but also those attributed to political and social culture. For example, it is more common and accepted to use such words as 'punish' in the

post-Soviet states—including Belarus—than in the Western countries, such as the United States: they often bare a less radical implication (see e.g. Wierzbicka, 1997, 1998; Balykina, 2013). It does not mean, however, that extreme statements devaluate completely in Lukašenka's speech, but it is crucial to understand that when he claims to 'punish' an opponent, it might not imply such a harsh attitude as in Trump's case. It is also understood that an authoritarian system may allow for more unexplained inconsistency in speeches than a democratic one. In the US, for instance, if the president self-contradicts himself, it usually receives media attention which demands clarification (Edwards & Wood, 1999). In Belarus, on the other hand, speech inconsistency may get ignored by the largely state-controlled media, leaving no precedent for subsequent explanation (Manaev, 2014). It is believed, however, that this limitation did not significantly hamper the research as Lukašenka often proceeded with citing and trying to explain his inconsistency himself.

The other limitations of this research concerned availability of time and finances to a postgraduate student. This analysis has processed almost 200,000 words which Lukašenka and Trump said over the last seven years, which have been almost equally distributed between the two leaders. More than 100,000 words were said by Lukašenka while more than 90,000 by Trump. Ideally, this analysis would like to consider more speeches and contexts for both presidents as this would increase its accuracy. However, even just retrieving a significantly larger corpus of speeches would be beyond the reasonable abilities of the researcher, let alone analysing those acts. Attracting an additional human and financial capital could have helped to increase those numbers, as well as—consequently—the precision of the findings. It is believed, however, that the research has still considered an adequate amount of data that turned out sufficiently representative and diverse. The size of the corpus has appeared comparable to the other similar researches, yet smaller than in—for example—Dyson and Parent's (2018) study of Vladimir Putin. Comparability of this analysis to the other works is also a subject of the researcher's acknowledgment.

2.6 Analysis, Timeframe and Context

This research focuses on a particular period of Lukašenka's and Trump's rule: starting from the mid-2010s to present. Partially, it is for the obvious reason of Donald Trump only being in power since 2017 and in the position of the president-elect since 2016, which is why an analysis taking the entire period of Lukašenka's rule for a comparison would suffer from dispro-

portionality. However, the other reason for adopting the given timeframe was that this period is generally classified as a highly vibrant in the countries' foreign policy. The further paragraphs elaborate on this matter.

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2013, the relations between the United States, Belarus and Russia have visibly transformed (see Kryvoi & Wilson, 2015; Woźniak, 2016). While Belarus aimed to mediate the conflict, the Kremlin has began to try and expand its influence over its territory: most recently, Russia has initiated the renewal of integration processes which has met mixed reactions from both Lukašenka and the public (Rust, 2020). Belarus' financial and military dependence on Russia has although persisted, forcing Lukašenka to adapt his strategies more rapidly and radically than before (Astapenia & Balkunets, 2016, p. 1). For the US, the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis marked the beginning of what such authors as Smith (2019, p. 1) and Legvold (2014, p. 74) called the 'new Cold War': a revived ideological and informational strife with Russia. At the same time, the presumed desire of Trump to maintain friendly relations with Putin led to controversies in the adopted policies and statements (Polyakova & Letsas, 2019; Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.).

As for China, both Belarus and the US have started to experience its increased economic influence, either in a cooperative or competitive manner. During the latest years, the Chinese economy has grown larger than ever and the US started to perceive it at least as a potential threat to its global economic hegemony (see Ghosh et al, 2018; Lee et al, 2018). Belarus, on the other hand, has seemed to find in the face of China a prospective alternative to Russia and the EU—both of which have had notoriously bouncy relationship with Lukašenka during his presidency (see Astapenia & Balkunets, 2016; Braga, 2016; Dyner, 2018). The combination of these factors has fostered foreign policy activity, diversity and adaptiveness, which is why provided a favourable context to investigate how deeply embedded were the belief systems of the considered leaders and—in general—gain a significant amount of operational code data.

In order to structure the analysis of operational code fluctuation in a consistent and replicable manner, this research has adopted a timeframe structured around important events related to Lukašenka's and Trump's foreign policies. The analysis is not directly tied to these events but rather uses them as markers of potentially significant rhetoric fluctuation. These events attribute to Belarus' and the US' relations with Russia and China, however, not exclusively in a direct way. Thus, for example, there has been an expectation that both presidents would be affected by the developments around the Ukrainian crisis; Trump could change his policy ap-

proach in light of the 2020 conflict with Iran; the EU sanctions lift from Belarus could impact Lukašenka's approach to the Eastern partners; as well as the COVID-19 pandemic was likely to affect the rhetoric of virtually any politician, let alone of these two leaders. Table 4, which is below, elaborates on the adopted timeframe.

Table 4. Key Foreign Policy Events

		Russia	China
Lukašenka	Early 2014 — Ukrainian crisis and annexation of Crimea	• 2017 — Diary ban • February 2017 — Re-establishment of border control from Russia • February 2018 - May 2019 — Another dairy ban • 2018-2019 — Integration dialogue • Early 2020 — Oil conflict	• Early-2010s - ongoing — China–Belarus Great Stone Industrial Park • October 2017 — China provides free military assistance to Belarus • August 2018 — Mutual visa-free entry • December 2019 — Belarus receives $500mln loan from China
Trump	2020 — COVID-19 Pandemic	• September 2015 — Russian military intervention in Syria • Late 2016 — Russian intervention in the US election • April 2017 — Khan Shaykhun chemical attack • March 2018 — Poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal • 14 April 2018 — Missile strikes against Syria • December 2019 — Nord Stream 2 Sanctions	• One-China policy • April 2017 — Trump Hosts Xi Jinping • March 2018 — Trump's Tariffs on China • April 2018 — China's punitive tariffs on American goods • October 2018 — Pence's speech • May 2019 — Tariffs' raise • January 2020 — 'Phase One' Trade Deal

Sources: Astapenia & Balkunets (2016); Braga (2016); Clarke & Ricketts (2017); Townsend & Kendall-Taylor (2019); Factbase (2020); President of the Republic of Belarus (2020)

The process of this analysis has been the following. Firstly, it has considered three genres of the presidents' speeches: interviews, public addresses and informal comments. Secondly, these speeches have been processed to retrieve the chosen operational code indices. While the verb analysis may be—and originally has been—mechanical, this dissertation has used the existing software tools called ProfilerPlus. This software is programmed to apply VICS principles as developed by Walker et al (2003) to the texts uploaded to it. It automatically pro-

duces P-1, P-2, I-1, and I-2 indices and provides the numerical value distribution of the verbs in the context. The other indices may hence be produced using the Microsoft Excel or other similar software, as well as manually, based on the provided data. It is a reliable tool for the analysis as recommended by one of the developers of the VICS-based OC analysis in Levine and Young (2014). The access to this software is free and has been granted to the researcher based on the submitted request. Thirdly, the produced indices have been decoded according to Table 3 in order to qualitatively assess their values and offer a more conventionally compre-hensible representation of the research findings. Fourthly, the indices available for both Lukašenka and Trump have been compared to each other across time, countries, the leaders themselves, as well as other world leaders. Fifthly, the last section of this thesis has evaluated the findings and provided recommendations for further research based on the gaps that this particular study could not fill or in itself created.

III. Results: What Do They Believe In?

3.1 Aliaksandr Lukašenka

The analysis starts from considering the belief system of Aliaksandr Lukašenka. This particular subsection retrieves the data from his interviews and informal comments that he has given over the period of the analysis. The first point of interest for this dissertation was Lukašenka's interviews to the non-governmental Russian media: in particular, his interview for *TV Rain* in May, 2014 (Sobchak, 2014), and to *Echo of Moscow* in December, 2019 (Venediktov, 2019). These are an hour to two-hour-long conversations that contain an extensive overview of his beliefs in relation to Russia. Due to the nature of the format, speech writing or editing should not have had a significant distorting effect on his statements and a reliable overview of Lukašenka's beliefs could be acquired. In addition to the full transcripts, there were videos or audios of the interviews available to verify the accuracy of the analysed communication instances. Finally, timing of the interviews allowed to learn if any notable shifts have occurred in Belarus president's operational code over the period covered by this analysis.

Table 5. Lukašenka's Interviews with Russian Independent Media

|	*May 2014*	*Dec 2019*
P-1. *Nature of Political Universe*	**0.34** (somewhat friendly)	**0.38** (definitely friendly)
I-1. *Strategic Approach to Goals*	**0.36** (somewhat cooperative)	**0.53** (definitely cooperative)
P-2. *Realisation of Political Values*	**0.10** (mixed)	**0.16** (somewhat optimistic)
I-2. *Tactical Pursuit of Goals*	**0.10** (mixed)	**0.32** (somewhat cooperative)
P-4. *Control Over Historical Development*	**0.25** (low)	**0.26** (low)
I-5. *Utility of Means*		
a. *Punish*	**0.133** (medium)	**0.06** (low)
b. *Threaten*	**0.053** (low)	**0.03** (very low)
c. *Oppose*	**0.133** (medium)	**0.15** (medium)
d. *Appeal*	**0.520** (very high)	**0.45** (very high)
e. *Promise*	**0.053** (low)	**0.05** (low)
f. *Reward*	**0.107** (low)	**0.26** (high)

Sources: Author's own calculations based on Sobchak (2014); Venediktov (2019)

Chart 1. Lukašenka's Interviews Indices
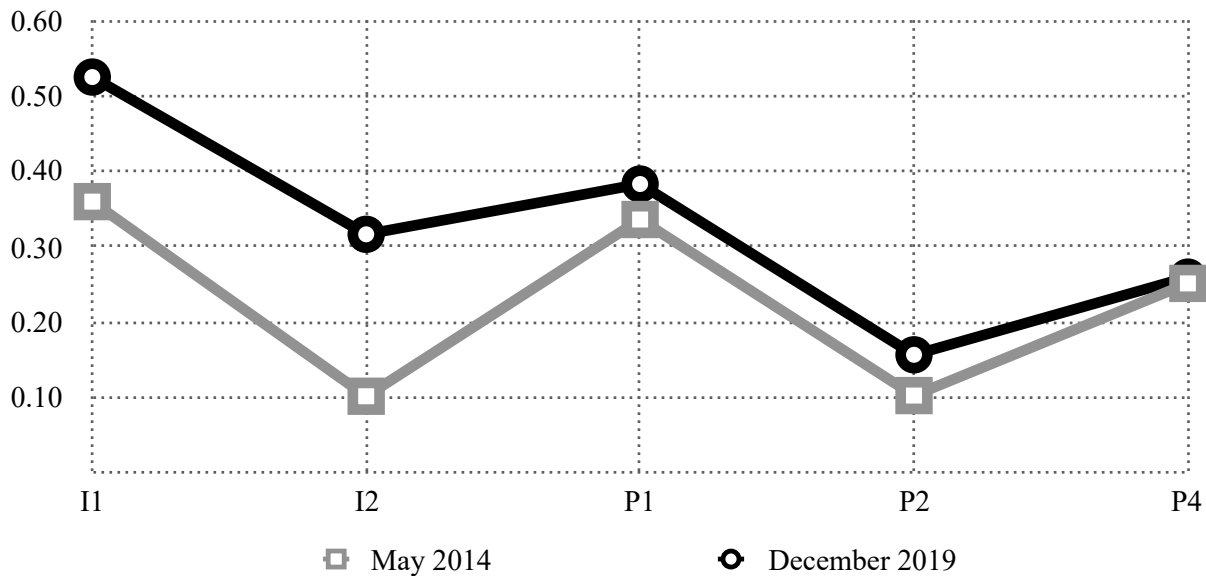
Sources: Author's own calculations based on Sobchak (2014); Venediktov (2019)

Chart 2. Lukašenka's Interviews I-5 Index
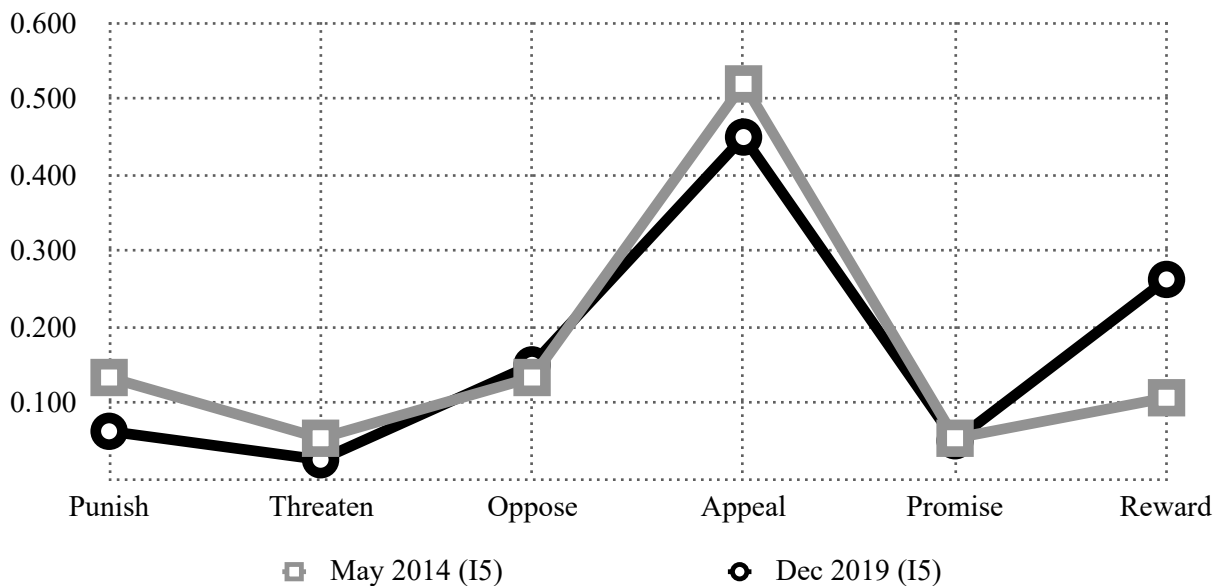
Sources: Author's own calculations based on Sobchak (2014); Venediktov (2019)

The major findings of this research part, as visible from Table 5 and the corresponding Charts 1 and 2, are that Lukašenka's sense of control over historical development (P-4) has remained virtually the same throughout those five years, whereas the utility of radical means has transformed significantly. As for P-4 value, the presented fluctuation of 0.01 over the years looks negligible and goes in line with the other speeches of the president given during the period of analysis. In the vast majority of cases, the value of this index has remained low. The utility of means, on the other hand, has turned around if looking at 'Punish' and 'Reward' distribution.

In 2014, Lukašenka's inclination to punish the opponents was at the medium level, dropping more than twice to the low level by 2019. Contrary, his inclination to reward increased in a mathematically similarly manner: 2.5 times from low to high. Interestingly, this shift correlates with a slight increase in P-1 and I-1 indexes, reflecting more friendly perception of the political universe and more cooperative strategic approach. In sum, these findings suggest that neither in 2014 nor in 2019, the Belarusian president could be described as a strongman in terms of his Russia-related foreign policy. In fact, this profile only strengthened since the mid-2010s. Stably low sense of historical control has combined with the decreased inclination to punish and increased one to reward the opponent. In He and Feng's (2013) terms, it makes Lukašenka a weak and subordinate leader.

The presented data also suggests that Lukašenka indeed possesses a trackable operational code as his views do not seem to change drastically in light of certain events. He is always optimistic over the political context and aims to promote cooperative approach that goes in line with the image of Belarus as a neutral, peace-making state. With the years of ongoing crisis in Ukraine, he has started to emphasise the connection between all three Eastern Slavic nations—Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians—rather than only Belarusians and Russians, and even non-slavic neighbours, calling for the regional partnership:

> Belarus is an ally of Russia and Ukraine. This is undeniable. This is our absolute priority. […] Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians are almost one nation. And the Lithuanians, of course, are our brothers. […] We are actually a tree with our branches today, but we have common roots (Lukašenka, 2019, as cited in Venediktov, 2019).

Lukašenka's opinion on Russia seems to be highly stable regardless of the stance of their relationship. He has maintained a friendly yet moderate and occasionally critical tone which allowed not to manifest excessively conflictual beliefs even in the instances of harsh complains. Thus, while criticising Russia for raising oil prices or introducing border control, he complains about the weakening brotherhood and friendship that Russia initiates:

> I will look for an alternative. […] I do not hide it from the leadership of Russia. […] At the first stage, I will take one pipe. […] I will take this oil and process it. If it works fine, I will take the second pipe in reverse. You will have one. […] You see it as a threat. But I ask you a question. Why are you driving me into solving this issue in this way? I do not want it. But why do you need this? Silence. So I'm not threatening (Lukašenka, 2019, as cited in Venediktov, 2019).

When, for example, receiving financial aid from Russia, Lukašenka, on the contrary, praises brotherly nature of Belarus' relations with Russia and welcomes the help. The major premise

of his message, however, remains the same: Russians and Belarusians are brothers, despite their relations are not always smooth. The similar pattern applies to his policy over integration as when Russia is pressuring Belarus to deepen the cooperation, Lukašenka stresses that the two states are separate *branches* of the same tree, hence merging is not possible; but when Russia aims to distant itself from Belarus, he argues that being a part of the same *tree* is still crucial. In particular, the aforementioned quote about capturing the oil pipes comes from the period of the most intense integration conflict when Russia has put Lukašenka in front of the tough and radical decision between accepting high resources price or agreeing for a deeper political integration (Rust, 2020). In this statement, he adopted threatening rhetoric, yet emphasised that he was not willing to do so, rather forced to. It means that Lukašenka is not in general an opportunist as the switches in his rhetoric still build around the fundamentally stable worldview, which makes it way even through the president's most extreme statements. The conclusions and discussion section further elaborates on this point.

Lukašenka spoke significantly less about China than Russia in all his interviews throughout the mid to late-2010s, as well as before, hence it is problematic to retrieve a detailed overviews of his beliefs of it via this form of communication. At the same time, he has been speaking more of China during his annual addresses or occasional comments, both of which this thesis considers further. As for the interviews part yet, the very fact that Lukašenka do not chose to speak extensively about China and neither he is being asked about it serves as a finding in itself. Perhaps, Lukašenka's attitude to China is not as important for the public and himself, as well as appears to be well-known. Indeed, those quotes available from the interviews considered and beyond illustrate that his attitude to China is significantly more straightforward and stable than to Russia: Lukašenka perceives China as an economic power, always mentions its investing opportunities and his willingness to cooperate with the country to seek mutual benefit. He also seems to depict China as a less political actor than Russia in the post-Soviet space. For instance, in his interview to Mir (2020) channel in April 2020, he provided the following reply when asked about his current view of the CIS:

> We have actually been torn apart. […] Central Asia, Asia—no matter how much we boast and rejoice—they still look at strong China. China helps Central Asia in a big way and, moreover, is behaving correctly, with dignity. China can help them with investments and so on, and helps, billions of dollars (Lukašenka, 2020, as cited in Mir, 2020).

As for the second part of this analysis which concerns informal comments, Lukašenka tends to provide them at the talks with people when he visits various cities, towns, plants, farms

and other enterprises in Belarus. Despite those visits are domestic, he often touches upon foreign policy there. It appears that he manifests his genuine beliefs in these instances as even if the questions that people ask him are staged, the answers do not seem to be such: he often makes controversial comments and, in general, does not use any prepared materials while speaking. Moreover, at these meetings Lukašenka often speaks himself, without answering any particular questions. Hence, around one hundred informal meetings of various kind that Lukašenka had completed since 2015 have been examined to reveal which beliefs the incumbent president had manifested regarding the policies towards Russia and China.

Table 6. Lukašenka's Informal Meetings Speeches

	Russia	*China*
P-1. *Nature of Political Universe*	**0.51** (definitely friendly)	**0.46** (definitely friendly)
I-1. *Strategic Approach to Goals*	**0.38** (definitely cooperative)	**0.65** (definitely cooperative)
P-2. *Realisation of Political Values*	**0.26** (somewhat optimistic)	**0.20** (somewhat optimistic)
I-2. *Tactical Pursuit of Goals*	**0.16** (somewhat cooperative)	**0.28** (somewhat cooperative)
P-4. *Control Over Historical Development*	**0.22** (low)	**0.18** (low)
I-5. *Utility of Means*		
a. *Punish*	**0.10** (low)	**0.09** (low)
b. *Threaten*	**0.05** (low)	**0.04** (very low)
c. *Oppose*	**0.15** (medium)	**0.04** (very low)
d. *Appeal*	**0.45** (very high)	**0.61** (very high)
e. *Promise*	**0.10** (low)	**0.04** (very low)
f. *Reward*	**0.13** (medium)	**0.17** (medium)

Sources: Author's own calculations based on President of the Republic of Belarus (2020)

The results visible at Table 6 illustrate that Lukašenka manifested highly friendly beliefs in those informal speeches, despite they also contained radical statements. In relation to both Russia and China, Belarus' president shown more willingness to cooperate than in his interviews, as well as perceived the system around him even more friendly. His control over historical development yet was at a lower level, which was more noticeable in case of China

than Russia. As for the means utilised, they were generally similar, with a notable exception of 'oppose' China: in his informal commentaries, Lukašenka proved to be significantly less inclined to do so than in interviews. At the same time, he also used phrasings that did not go in line with the overall profile of his operational code. For example, during his recent visit of a high-tech factory, he asked Belarusians not to 'kneel before the Russians' (Lukašenka, 2020, as cited in President of the Republic of Belarus, 2020, May 22); while in 2018, when visiting one of Belarus' largest farm equipment factories in Homiel, he claimed:

> We have a difficult period now—Russians behave barbarously towards us, I'm saying about this publicly. They demand something from us, as if we were their vassals, and they don't want to fulfil their obligations (Lukašenka, 2018, as cited in President of the Republic of Belarus, 2018, August 10).

This statement emerged in the middle of one of the diary crises, loans negotiations and less than two weeks before Lukašenka's meeting with Putin in Russia. It might be hence that in this way, Lukašenka was trying to appear more 'strong' in front of the domestic audience as expected difficult upcoming negotiations with Russia's president, which could require taking an actually weaker position from him in order to secure better economic deals.

Economy has always appeared to be the key point of Lukašenka's beliefs adaptation. Thus, he has been manifesting contradicting beliefs regarding China as usually he would call it the major economic power and a financial giant, but when visiting Minsk vegetable production in 2015, he has implied that Chinese market was inferior to the European one:

> We gave our markets to the Spaniards, the Dutch, who wreck us all the time, while we have to make our way to Africa and China. Is this normal? No! (Lukašenka, 2015, as cited in President of the Republic of Belarus, 2015, July 31)

It is important to understand two factors with regards to the presented information. Firstly, 2015 was the year of presidential election and it is logical to assume that Lukašenka needed Russia's favourable attitude to him more than normally to secure his political positions, that is why downgrading the importance of China could be a signal that Belarus was not seeking to find a major economic partner alternative to Russia. Secondly, it was striking how even in the most radical claims Lukašenka usually saw the rise of tensions—same as maintenance of peace—not in his or his opponents' actions, but rather in history, often referring to his own educational background of a historian. He referred to the character of Belarus' relations with both Russia and China not as situational, but rather steaming from their cooperation or con-

flict long before. In this perception, Russia and the EU have always been geographically and culturally closer to Belarus than China, which is why Lukašenka could not overemphasise the role of China to him and leverage the rhetoric in an opportunistic way: that would contradict his fundamental belief of historical predetermination. Hence naturally, this analysis has revealed low sense of control over historical development in Lukašenka's informal commentaries. Belarus' leader preferred to appeal to the historical partnership or conflict rather than initiating either of those himself. This, consequently, indicates the lack of strongman tendencies in Lukašenka's actions at the foreign level.

3.2 Donald Trump

This subsection uncovers the beliefs of Donald Trump by looking at the interviews given and informal comments made during his current presidential term. As with Aliaksandr Lukašenka, the first part considers the interviews. In this case, the advantages of looking at this genre of speech is exactly the same—the nature of its format in theory provides a reliable insight into one's views, bypassing speech-writing and editing—while in the democratic setting of the United States serves as potentially even more representative of the presidential views. As, unfortunately, none of Trump's interviews have focused as extensively on Russia or China as in Lukašenka's case, the analysis has considered a variety of twenty six different interviews from Trump's first (2017) and latest (August 2019 to August 2020) years of presidency that he has given to media outlets of different affiliation: European and American ones, of liberal and conservative orientation, private and state-owned or affiliated.

The OC analysis of interviews has revealed that while in the majority of aspects Trump's beliefs had remained the same over the period of his presidency, in the other ones he had experienced significant learning. The results of the indices coding are visible from Table 7. As for their interpretation, it is evident that Trump's philosophical beliefs, particularly his overview of the nature of political universe and realisation of political goals, remained at the same level: P-1 has remained somewhat friendly and P-2 appeared to be mixed. On the other hand, Trump's instrumental beliefs have transformed notably: his strategic approach to goals (I-1) has dropped from definitely cooperative in 2017 to the borderline of only somewhat cooperative in 2019-2020; while tactical pursuit of goals (I-2) has become more cooperative over the given period. His sense of control over historical development (P-4) has increased slightly from 0.29 to 0.32, yet still remained at the low level. Mixed transformations also occurred in

the utility of Trump's means (I-5). Thus, throughout his term, Trump has become significantly less inclined to appeal, but way more likely to oppose and reward. All those transformations suggest that Trump's learning made his beliefs more like those of a strongman: his feeling of control has slightly increased with the tendency to oppose, while his desire to cooperate decreased, same as did his will for appealing. Notably, the observed pattern indicates the shift in instrumental beliefs with the stagnation of philosophical ones: precisely the opposite to what the conventional literature dealing with the operational code learning would consider common. The final section of this thesis examines this aspect in more details.

Table 7. Trump's Interviews

	2017	*Mid 2019 – Mid 2020*
P-1. *Nature of Political Universe*	**0.14** (somewhat friendly)	**0.13** (somewhat friendly)
I-1. *Strategic Approach to Goals*	**0.40** (definitely cooperative)	**0.18** (somewhat cooperative)
P-2. *Realisation of Political Values*	**– 0.02** (mixed)	**– 0.06** (mixed)
I-2. *Tactical Pursuit of Goals*	**0.11** (mixed)	**0.15** (somewhat cooperative)
P-4. *Control Over Historical Development*	**0.29** (low)	**0.32** (low)
I-5. *Utility of Means*		
a. Punish	**0.131** (medium)	**0.159** (medium)
b. Threaten	**0.049** (low)	**0.000** (very low)
c. Oppose	**0.115** (low)	**0.250** (high)
d. Appeal	**0.574** (very high)	**0.270** (high)
e. Promise	**0.033** (low)	**0.045** (low)
f. Reward	**0.098** (low)	**0.272** (high)

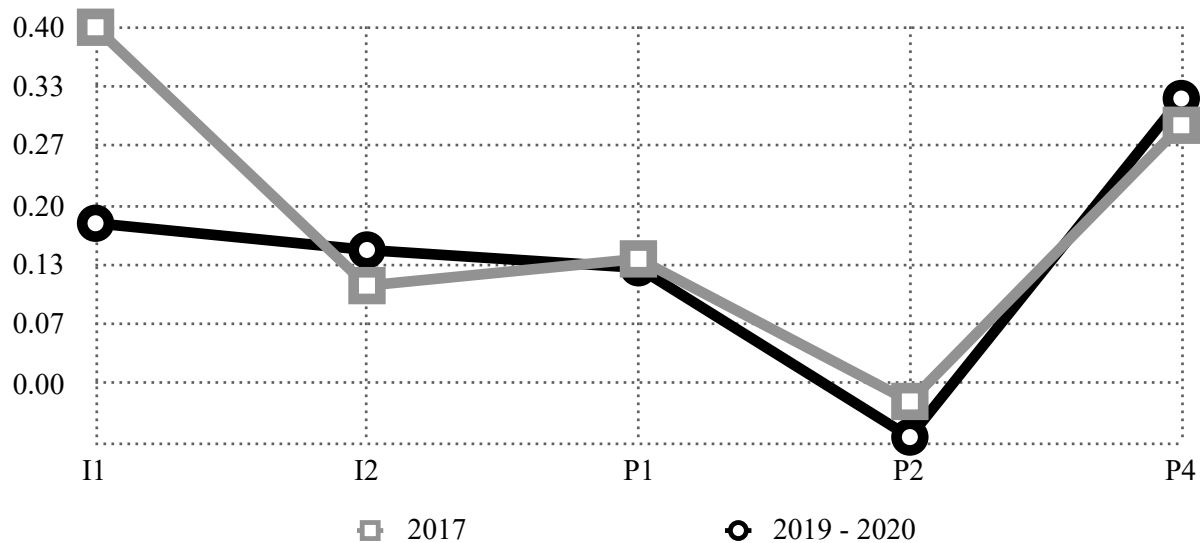*Sources*: Author's own calculations based on Factbase (2020)

The aforementioned overview of the operational code indeed finds confirmation in the particular interview quotes where Trump expressed his beliefs. Thus, in the beginning of his presidency, Trump have manifested a visible willingness to cooperate with Russia in Syria to combat ISIS, and said in his interview for *Fox News*:

> I don't know Putin, but if we can get along with Russia, that's a great thing. It's good for Russia, it's good for us. We go out together and knock the hell out of ISIS (Trump, 2017, as cited in Factbase, 2017, October 23).

With all the positive attitude to Russia yet, it seemed like Trump did want to look weak or dependent on it in any way, as well as he clearly aimed to maintain his image of a strong leader. Thus, commenting on one of numerous questions regarding the Russian intervention in the US election, Trump claimed in November 2017:
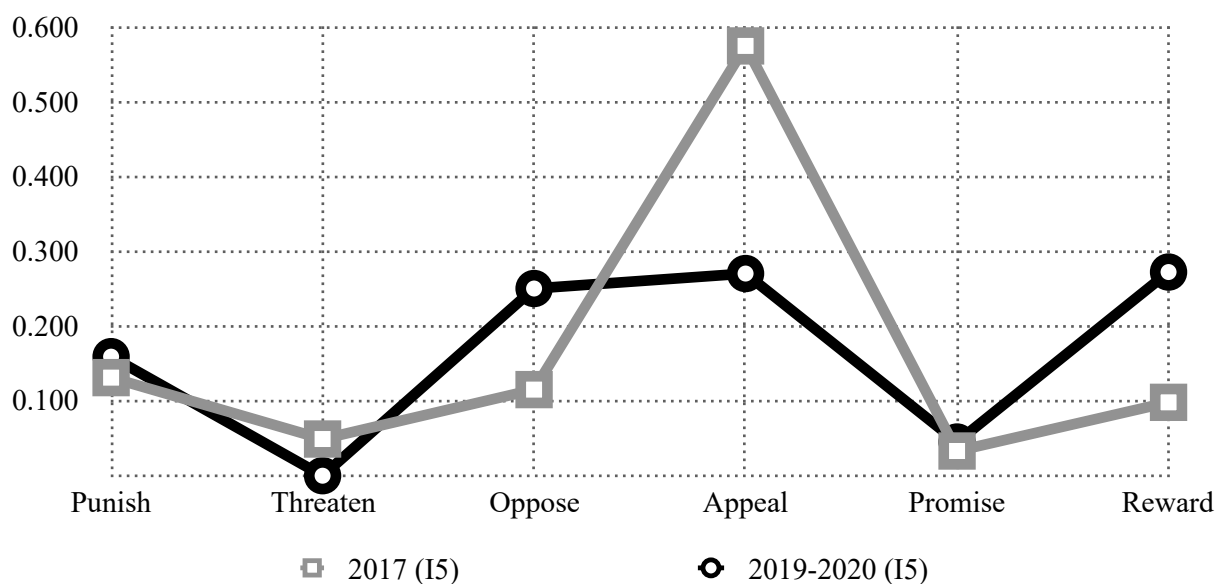
> I think the last one Russia would want to be president is me because of my attitude on oil and because of my attitude on the military and strength (Trump, 2017, as cited in Full Measure with Sharyl Attkisson, 2017).

Chart 3. Trump's Interview Indices

Sources: Author's own calculations based on Factbase (2020)

Chart 4. Trump's Interview I-5 Index

Sources: Author's own calculations based on Factbase (2020)

On the other hand, Trump was highly sceptical of China at this time. Answering the question about the possibility of introducing similar custom duties policy to Europe as to China in his January 2017 interview to the *Times of London* and *Bild* he said that '[i]t's going to be different […] 'cause China [was] a tremendous problem' (Trump, 2017, as cited in The Times, 2017). In fact, economy was the major source of Trump's concern in the relations with China:

> So, China on trade has ripped off this country more than any other element of the world in history has ripped off anything. But I can be different if they're helping us with North Korea (Trump, 2017, as cited in The New York Times, 2017).

In his statements over this period of time he yet aimed to maintain a relatively cooperative profile. When refereeing personally to Xi Jinping, rather than China as such, Trump usually emphasised how well they seemed to get along with each other. For example, his April 2017 interview for *Fox News'* Maria Bartiromo contains the following statement, coming after Trump hosted Xi Jinping during his visit to the United States:

> I had a very, very good meeting with President Xi of China. Really liked him, we had a great chemistry I think, I mean, at least I had great—maybe he didn't like me but I think he liked me. We were going to have a ten or fifteen-minute sit-down that lasted for three hours (Trump, 2017, as cited in Factbase, 2017, October 20).

Similar attitude was manifested in relation to Putin as well, yet perhaps one of the most persistent features of Trump's speech at that time was that when mentioning any kind of attitude to both Russia and China, he aimed not to refer to it as a unique one:

> I've made tremendous and created great foundations in terms of relationships with China and with Japan and with many, many other countries (Trump, 2017, as cited in Factbase, 2017, October 19).

Regardless of all the events that occurred between China and the US during Trump's presidency, he maintained virtually the same attitude to this country. He kept viewing it first of all as the major economic—rather than a political—rival that has not only been competing with the United States but bringing damage to its economy:

> You have to understand, China has been taking out 500 billion dollars a year for many years out of our country, OK, hundreds of billions of dollars. 200 billion, 300 billion, 500 billion, 400 billion back and forth. But on average, hundreds of billions of—not millions, hard to believe, billions (Trump, 2020, as cited in Factbase, 2020, February 3).

At the same time, he did not hesitate to showcase the presumable success of his presidency in the battle with China:

> You know, if you look back, everybody said China was going to capture the United States in terms of the economy, it would surpass the United States within the second year of the Presidency [...] Well, we picked up trillions and trillions of dollars in value, they've lost trillions. They're having the worst year that they've had in fifty seven years and we're having the best year we've ever had, and we are now so far ahead of them (Trump, 2020, as cited in Factbase, 2020, February 3).

Speaking of Russia, Trump also generally maintained the tone adopted in the beginning of his presidency. He manifested his willingness to cooperate with the country, yet emphasised that he was independent from its influence and would not let it undermine his authority or the one of the United States. Thus, Trump repeatedly claimed to be 'tougher on Russia than any president in history' (see e.g. Factbase, 2019, November 22), but he also emphasised his desire to 'have a good relationship with Russia' (he has claimed it repeatedly, for one example see e.g. Trump, 2018, as cited in Factbase, 2018, December 1). Similar to his initial claims about Putin and Xi Jinping, Trump kept claiming to have positive attitude and warm personal relationship with the incumbent leadership of the considered counterparts, but not necessarily with the countries—they have remained rivals to him. For example, in his interview to Sharyl Attkisson on *Full Measure* in May 2020 he claimed:

> I've been the worst thing that ever happened to Russia. Putin understands that. I get along with Putin, but he understands that. He probably doesn't want me to win. I can tell you right now, except I think he likes me, but I'm sure he doesn't want me to win (Trump, 2020, as cited in Full Measure Staff, 2020).

Overall, it is striking how often Trump has been using the same or almost the same phrasings over a period from the beginning to the end of his first presidential term: for example, about being tough on Russia, or China bringing multi-billion damage to the US economy.

The second part of this analysis looks at the informal comments that Trump has provided about China and Russia over the time of his presidency. Table 8 presents the results in details. As opposed to Lukašenka, Trump does not conduct informal visits of farms, factories or provincial towns on a regular basis. He occasionally meets the representatives of the working class and makes informal comments during the visits at other kinds of places, yet again, this does not have such a consistent basis for the comparative and continuous investigation as in Lukašenka's case. This is why this dissertation has decided to focus on an alternative source of informal comments for Trump and considered the president's tweets. They appeared to be the major source of Trump's opinion that was communicated informally and on a regular basis, as well as were supposed not to be a subject of significant editing.

The analysis has revealed that Trump's operational code manifested via Twitter is different from the one he manifests in interviews, yet the extent of these deviations varies drastically between the individual aspects and referred states. Trump has been proved to possess highly similar operational code in relation to China when comparing his interviews and Twitter, only that he manifested more cooperative tendencies and lower sense of control over historical development in his tweets. As for Russia, however, his operational code has been highly different. He appeared almost hostile as his overview of the political system and strategic approach to this country were at mixed level, and his tactical pursuit of goals was somewhat conflictual. The means he was willing to adopt leaned considerably towards punishment and threats, while his sense of control over historical development was at very low level.

Table 8. Trump's Twitter

	Russia	*China*
P-1. *Nature of Political Universe*	**0.07** (mixed)	**0.25** (somewhat friendly)
I-1. *Strategic Approach to Goals*	− **0.09** (mixed)	**0.52** (definitely cooperative)
P-2. *Realisation of Political Values*	− **0.006** (mixed)	**0.09** (mixed)
I-2. *Tactical Pursuit of Goals*	− **0.21** (somewhat conflictual)	**0.27** (somewhat cooperative)
P-4. *Control Over Historical Development*	**0.06** (very low)	**0.15** (low)
I-5. *Utility of Means*		
a. Punish	**0.24** (high)	**0.11** (low)
b. Threaten	**0.15** (medium)	**0.04** (very low)
c. Oppose	**0.15** (medium)	**0.08** (low)
d. Appeal	**0.39** (very high)	**0.45** (high)
e. Promise	**0.03** (very low)	**0.06** (low)
f. Reward	**0.03** (very low)	**0.25** (high)

Sources: Author's own calculations based on Trump (n.d.)

One must not forget that Twitter represents its own unique form of communication and hence may promote a speaker to manifest an opinion in a way which is different from the real life or other social media—often it is a more active, open and engaging one (Qiu et al, 2012, p. 716). At the same time, the changes occurring exactly due to this peculiarity are unlikely to be as significant as observed in Trump's speech. In this case, another possible explanation to such a

drastic shift may be that an informal character of tweeting and stronger personal affiliation of Trump to what he declares via this social network—as this is his personal account—allowed to address the blames for being overly friendly with Putin and the election intervention scandal bypassing the official-level statements. Thus, he was actively trying to refute those accusations and adopted hostile rhetoric, especially in relation to Russia's actions in Syria and their support for Bashar al-Assad. Just a few examples include the following tweets:

> Russia, Syria, and Iran are killing, or on their way to killing, thousands of innocent civilians in Idlib Province. Don't do it! Turkey is working hard to stop this carnage. (Trump, 2019, December 25)[7]

> Hearing word that Russia, Syria and, to a lesser extent, Iran, are bombing the hell out of Idlib Province in Syria, and indiscriminately killing many innocent civilians. The World is watching this butchery. What is the purpose, what will it get you? STOP! (Trump, 2019, June 2)

> Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria. Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and "smart!" You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it! (Trump, 2018, April 10)

> Many dead, including women and children, in mindless CHEMICAL attack in Syria. Area of atrocity is in lockdown and encircled by Syrian Army, making it completely inaccessible to outside world. President Putin, Russia and Iran are responsible for backing Animal Assad. Big price… (Trump, 2018, April 7)

From these examples it is also visible why Trump's P-4 ended up being so low when considering his Twitter as opposed to the interviews. In Twitter comments, he preferred to criticise, blame or support certain actions and events rather than claiming what was his plan of responding to them. In the interviews, on the other hand, he was telling more about how he negotiated deals, took decisive actions or caused impact in any other way.

3.3 Comparison

From the analysis already presented, this dissertation discovered the following similarities and differences between the operational codes of Trump and Lukašenka. As for the beliefs manifested in the presidents' interviews, fundamental differences concerned their philosophical beliefs more than the instrumental ones. Thus, Lukašenka has proved to possess significantly more friendly views on the nature of political universe and more optimistic take on the realisation of political values. Both leaders scored rather low in terms of their sense of control

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[7] Notably, Trump first deleted this tweet and then posted it again in one hour. It is likely that the reason for that was a typo in the word 'of'.

over historical development, yet Trump scored generally higher. At the same time, their methods of approaching the international system seemed to coincide in many aspects. In the earlier period of the analysis, Lukašenka and Trump had the same distribution of means utility and practically the same strategic approach and tactical pursuit of goals. Yet the previously discussed learning of Trump has significantly transformed his instrumental beliefs, while Lukašenka's ones did not change as drastically. Both leaders' I-1 changed notably, yet in the opposite directions, resulting in Trump's strategic approach becoming way less cooperative than Lukašenka's. The latter one has also become more cooperative than the former in terms of his tactical pursuit of goals (I-2). This led to the divergence of leaders in those characteristics, potentially depicting Trump as being or becoming more strongman than Lukašenka in terms of his foreign policy approach. These results also indicate that both leaders likely possess at least some form of stable belief system and are not as opportunist as some literature suggests: while their instrumental beliefs transformed to a various extent, philosophical beliefs of Lukašenka and Trump remained stable.

The analysis of their informal comments, however, provided a different picture. Trump and Lukašenka had manifested drastically diverse attitude to Russia and China separately, as well as in terms of their overall approach. Hence, Lukašenka had significantly more friendly and cooperative beliefs than Trump, which was especially visible in relation to Russia. While Trump's strategic approach and realisation of political values were mixed, Lukašenka's ones were definitely cooperative and somewhat optimistic, respectively. Moreover, Trump has manifested a somewhat conflictual tactical pursuit of goals where Lukašenka manifested a somewhat cooperative one. They also possessed largely opposing utilities of means. The presidents were more similar to each other in terms of their view on China, yet Trump still manifested a notably more negative overview of this counterpart. Interestingly, Trump was yet more inclined than Lukašenka to reward China. At the same time, the considered leaders had shown different extent of variability in their approach to different actors: while Lukašenka's Russia-related beliefs were generally comparable to China-related ones, in Trump's case, these formed two completely opposite strategies, especially in terms of the instrumental beliefs. The sense of control over historical development remained low for both leaders and dropped to very low in Trump's beliefs to Russia. Otherwise, the P-4 of two leaders was relatively similar to each other's. These findings suggest that not only a leader him/herself matters for the assessment of their beliefs, but also that other parties involved should be considered.

Moreover, the other three major conclusions follow from the findings of the last paragraphs. Firstly, Lukašenka has generally maintained the image of a non-opportunist throughout both interview and informal comments analysis. His philosophical and instrumental beliefs have remained relatively consistent across the time, counterparts and genres of speech. Trump, on the other hand, shown a considerable fluctuation of his philosophical and instrumental beliefs in relation to his counterparts and speech genres. It inclines this research to think of Trump if not as of an opportunist, then at least as of a political actor with an unstable belief system. Secondly, it appears that the political system in which Trump operates—a democratic great power—prompts him to adapt his beliefs as opposed to Lukašenka who's freedom is virtually unlimited as of the sole governor of a small state. For example, Trump manifested inconsistency in his statements about Russia, which might be because of the pressure put domestically and internationally on him. He tried not to attack Russia excessively as was willing to maintain friendly relations with Putin, yet still believed he needed to act tough as the Russian foreign policy contradicted the interests of the US and the liberal world. Hence, he aimed to manifest non-cooperative views at the same time as friendly ones. Lukašenka, on the other hand, has maintained stably compromised relation to Russia in all the considered speeches, supposedly as free from systematic constraints and being able to say virtually anything he wanted to. Thirdly, the evidence suggests that neither Trump nor Lukašenka appear particularly 'strong' with their sense of control over historical development at low to very low level, and the I-5 overview showing little inclination to utilise radical means of action.

It is problematic, however, for the comparison above to serve as fully representative. It does not provide an adequate face-to-face contrasting of two individuals as the contexts of the considered speeches and their quantity are disproportionate. In particular, Trump's analysis involved a mixture of small interview pieces, while Lukašenka's one consisted of significantly more substantial full interviews; as well as their China-related beliefs analysis was rather uneven as Lukašenka spoke about it less. At the same time, the research of informal comments was not equal as the method of delivering those comments differed among the presidents: for Trump it was via Twitter and for Lukašenka it was offline, as a part of domestic visits. That is why this section provides another, more comparable overview of the leaders' OCs. In particular, it considers the annual addresses of Lukašenka and Trump: the State of the Nation Address (SON) and the State of the Union Address (SOTU), respectively. These have served as a balanced comparative sample of speeches as they had been similar and substantial in size, addressed generally the same matters and had a comparable balance of foreign and domestic

policy topics. Lukašenka has been delivering SONs every April with all addresses since 2014 included in the analysis[8]. Trump has been delivering SOTUs every February since 2018, as well as delivered a speech to joint session of Congress in February of 2017, which was highly similar in its nature and content to the following SOTUs. All these annual speeches have been included in the analysis presented beneath, with the detailed results in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. Lukašenka's State of the Nation Addresses

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
P-1. *Nature of Political Universe*	0.46	0.46	0.46	0.4	**0.35**	0.4
I-1. *Strategic Approach to Goals*	0.44	0.5	0.57	0.57	**0.26**	0.4
P-2. *Realisation of Political Values*	0.24	0.23	0.27	0.19	**0.14**	0.22
I-2. *Tactical Pursuit of Goals*	0.21	0.18	0.28	0.26	**0.04**	0.2
P-4. *Control Over Historical Development*	0.25	0.26	0.2	0.24	**0.2**	0.21
I-5. *Utility of Means*						
a. *Punish*	0.075	0.172	0.053	0.096	**0.147**	0.033
b. *Threaten*	0.088	0.009	0.093	0.051	**0.088**	0.056
c. *Oppose*	0.116	0.069	0.067	0.07	**0.132**	0.222
d. *Appeal*	0.469	0.509	0.493	0.503	**0.471**	0.511
e. *Promise*	0.088	0.095	0.12	0.102	**0.088**	0.056
f. *Reward*	0.163	0.147	0.173	0.178	**0.074**	0.122

Sources: Author's own calculations based on President of the Republic of Belarus (2020)

The most pronounced findings that follow from the comparative analysis are the following. Firstly—and in line with the individual comparison—both Lukašenka and Trump have highly similar and stable sense of control over the historical development (P-4). It has remained at low level throughout the entire period of analysis with no more than six-point fluctuation in Lukašenka's case, three-point in Trump's case, and eight-point in a given year between the two. On average, Trump has higher value of this index yet the difference is negligible. This

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[8] Unfortunately, he postponed his 2020 address due to 'coronapsychosis in the world' (Lenta.ru, 2020) and desire to merge it with the presidential campaign. This speech has been delivered after the submission of the final draft of this thesis.

suggests that both Lukašenka and Trump are not particularly strongmen if judged by this aspect. Secondly, the research has discovered differences in the consistency of leaders' means utility. Lukašenka has manifested a rather stable preference across all the means, while Trump's willingness, for example, to 'Reward' and 'Promise' has fluctuated noticeably across the time of his government. Thirdly, radical shifts in the operational codes of two leaders have occurred in 2018 for Lukašenka and in 2019 for Trump, as visible from Chart 5. The next paragraphs further discuss these shifts and attempt to explain the reasons behind them.

Table 10. Trump's State of the Union Addresses

	2017	*2018*	*2019*	*2020*
P-1. *Nature of Political Universe*	0.43	0.35	**0.33**	0.31
I-1. *Strategic Approach to Goals*	0.5	0.49	**0.07**	0.6
P-2. *Realisation of Political Values*	0.17	0.14	**0.15**	0.11
I-2. *Tactical Pursuit of Goals*	0.25	0.25	**− 0.02**	0.35
P-4. *Control Over Historical Development*	0.29	0.28	**0.24**	0.27
I-5. *Utility of Means*				
a. Punish	0.111	0.175	**0.207**	0.143
b. Threaten	0.042	0.032	**0.086**	0.012
c. Oppose	0.097	0.048	**0.172**	0.048
d. Appeal	0.431	0.381	**0.328**	0.393
e. Promise	0.125	0.095	**0.034**	0.071
f. Reward	0.194	0.27	**0.172**	0.333

Sources: Author's own calculations based on Factbase (2020)

Overall, while both leaders maintained a relatively stable perception of the surrounding geopolitical system, their manifested means of addressing the challenges became significantly more radical and less cooperative. Thus, Lukašenka's previously and subsequently definitely cooperative strategic approach to goals became only somewhat cooperative, and his tactical pursuit of goals became mixed, rather than somewhat cooperative. The president previously not inclined to punish, experienced a further dropping increase in this tendency: from low in 2017, to medium in 2018, to very low in 2019. Notably, Lukašenka's tendency to punish was

at even higher level in 2015, yet that year did not see such a decline in the rewarding one. In 2018, the president was at least twice as less willing to reward as at any other year before and after. The similar switch occurred in Trump's case: diverging from somewhat or definitely cooperative strategic approach to the mixed one in 2019, he was significantly less likely to reward as a year before and after, while his tendency to punish was at its highest. Utility of other means—especially appealing, which always dominated—remained virtually unchanged for both presidents. In general, Trump has been less stable in his OC than Lukašenka from year to year and more prone to such strongmen actions as punishment and threat.

Chart 5. Comparison of Trump's SOTU and Lukašenka's SON
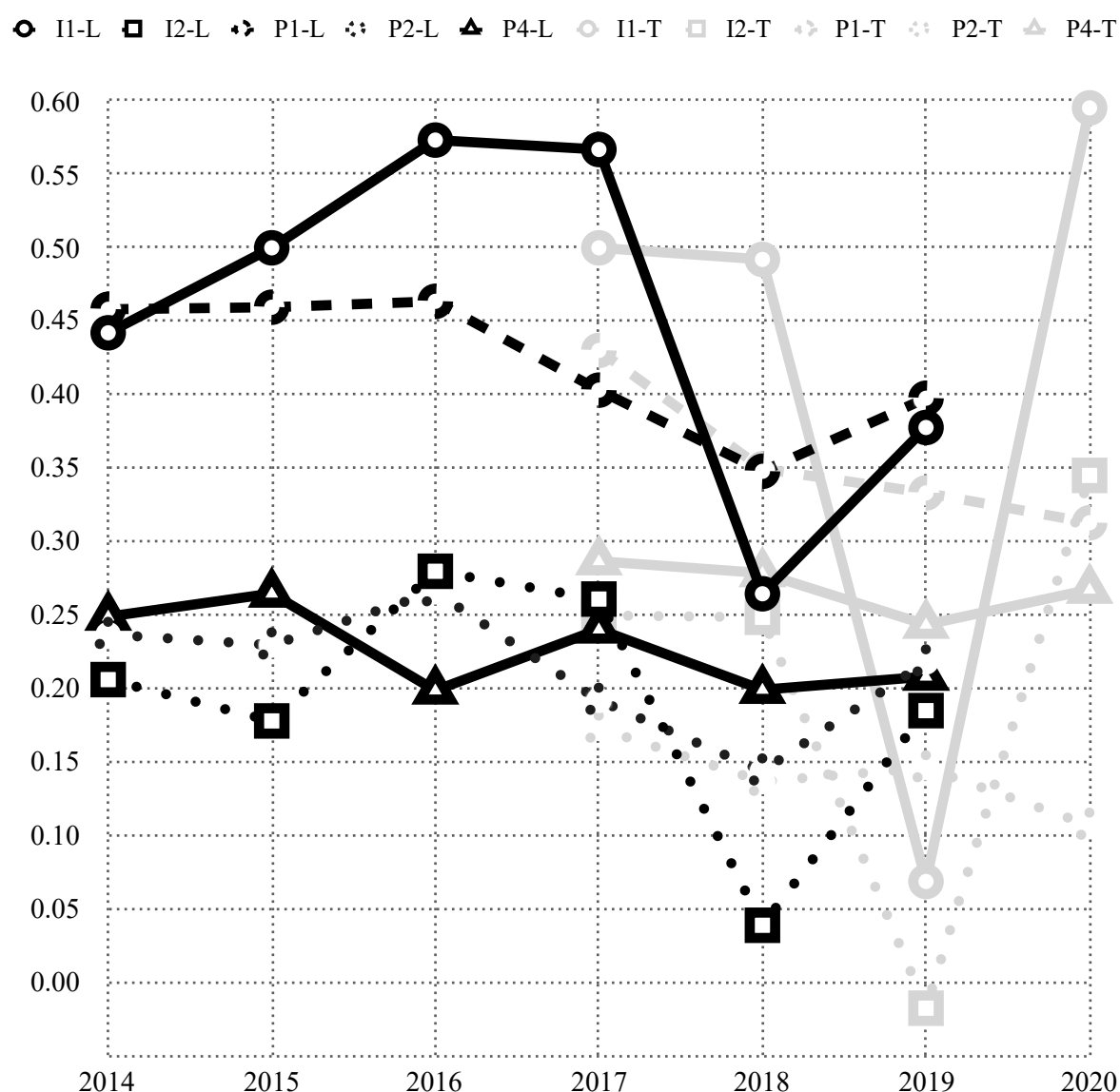
Sources: Author's own calculations based on Factbase (2020); President of the Republic of Belarus (2020)

From this picture, it seems like both leaders indeed had a certain set of pre-existing beliefs that they aimed to promote during the major public addresses of a year, which did not yet appear to fit the political context of the diverging years. Thus, Lukašenka's 2018 SON happened in the middle of another diary ban from Russia, as well as in what the president himself called 'the most difficult international environment' (Lukašenka, 2018, as cited in President of the Republic of Belarus, 2018, April 24). The major reason for his concerns was not the Russian actions *per se*, but rather what he perceived as a lack of global cooperation, including within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. While economic aspects were still important for Lukašenka, he claimed that he did not see the diary ban from that perspective. He insisted that this was a political, and a conflictual move from Russia:

> You can't carry [milk] in tanks as they allegedly found an 'infection' there, but pour it into packages and the 'infection' disappears. One can draw their your own conclusions. Colliding like that with each other we are losing each other (Lukašenka, 2018, as cited in President of the Republic of Belarus, 2018, April 24).

Lukašenka was speaking as the Belarusian foreign policy had taken a more active direction than before, yet overall maintaining a neutral and cooperative image he usually promoted:

> Belarus managed to occupy its own niche in the world, becoming an independent regional player. Global foreign policy initiatives based on the ideas of security and cooperation (the so-called Helsinki-2 process) have become a logical expression of the unifying agenda proposed by Minsk to the international community. […] The international community saw the ability of Minsk to implement significant projects. Increasing the role of Belarus in regional and international politics is a common strategic task [of the government]. […] We do not have excessive geopolitical ambitions, but we do not have an outsider complex (Lukašenka, 2018, as cited in President of the Republic of Belarus, 2018, April 24).

In China, he seemed to find a new partner that would be an alternative to both Russia and the EU, however, tried to maintain moderate rhetoric that would presumably not undermine Belarus' relations with any of those parties:

> The European Union is our neighbour. And a neighbour from God. As an axiom, we have to live with our neighbours, and we better be friends and keep peace, which is what we are doing. Recently, relations with the People's Republic of China have reached an outstripping development. […] We have never been friends and will not be friends against anyone. […] We will intensify our relations on the eastern vector with both *our* Russia and the People's Republic of China. This is our strongest support, this is good (Lukašenka, 2018, as cited in President of the Republic of Belarus, 2018, April 24).

For Trump, the time of 2019 SOTU coincided with the escalating trade war with China. Mutual tariffs imposition and tightening competition led to the highly critical speech of the US

vice-president Mike Pence, which he delivered in October of the preceding year. He accused China of putting pressure on the United States, reassuring that the latter would toughen its China-related policy (Perlez, 2018). Less than in half a year, president Trump has indeed attracted more attention to the US-China relations in his address than before, claiming:

> We are now making it clear to China that after years of targeting our industries and stealing our intellectual property, the theft of American jobs and wealth has come to an end (Trump, 2019, as cited in White House, 2019, February 5).

Importantly though, while trying to manifest a hardline policy towards China, Trump still cared to maintain a cooperative tone:

> I have great respect for President Xi and we are now working on a new trade deal with China. But it must include real structural change to end unfair trade practices, reduce our chronic trade deficit, and protect American jobs (Trump, 2019, as cited in White House, 2019, February 5).

Hence, it is evident that both Trump and Lukašenka were willing to actively address the arising challenges to their usual approaches, showing that they were taking actions to change the geopolitical system according to their view; however, the corresponding statements were not at all exclusively conflictual. It confirms at least restricted strongman features of their ruling style, yet one must not forget the following two limitations. Firstly, the considered public addresses targeted domestic audiences, suggesting that the presidents could aim to promote those images they would like to have domestically rather than internationally. On the other hand, it still does not confirm or refute whether they would argue differently addressing the foreign public and if so, in what way. Partially, this overview is seen from the analysis of their interviews and informal comments, despite these ones also were not highly representative. Unfortunately, there were not enough speeches which Trump and Lukašenka delivered in front of a foreign audience or which were intended for it, thus creating a separate sample was not possible. This research hopes that as the amount of presidents' speeches increases with time, further studies would be able to prepare such a sample. Secondly, almost every time the presidents argued for tougher policies they still aimed to be moderate and respect their counterparts. For this reason, any claims regarding their strongmanship must be careful as it is not clear in which proportion the given statements consisted of genuine beliefs or pretences. It is likely that Trump and Lukašenka only *wanted to* appear strong temporarily but not *to be* ones in a long run. The fact that this divergence from their generally less strong beliefs occurred only in isolated years and did not sustain for longer indirectly supports this claim.

3.4 Comparison to Other World Leaders

As the final part of its research, this dissertation compares the operational codes of Lukašenka and Trump to those of the other world leaders, including both democratic and authoritarian ones. These leaders are Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, Russia's president Vladimir Putin, China's General Secretaries Xi Jinping and Hu Jintao, ex-prime minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair, and ex-president of the United States George W. Bush. The reason for accomplishing such a comparison is to see how the supposed strongmen perform in relation to the other similar or, on the contrary, less autocratic politicians, in order to draw informed conclusions over their characters when put in context. The analysis selects exactly the afore-mentioned leaders as they form a representative sample, allowing for a balanced comparison. Thus, Angela Merkel is a democratic leader considered to be highly cooperative (Yoder, 2011), whereas George W. Bush and Tony Blair are also democratic yet supposedly more conflictual leaders (Durant et al, 2010; Parmar, 2005). Xi Jinping, Hu Jintao and Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, are autocrats who not only seem to share beliefs but also to split in some of them (Repnikova, 2018; Hengjun, 2014; He & Feng, 2013; Zhang, 2015). It is also important that the selected leaders were operating during different periods of time, which were still close to the contemporary one. The data for the comparison is secondary and comes from the operational code researches by Nhandara (2015), Nykänen (2016), Renshon (2008), Dyson and Parent (2018), and He and Feng (2013).

The considered aspects of both Lukašenka's and Trump's operational codes were either consistent with those of the democratic leaders or shown lower sense of historical control, with higher tendency to punish, threaten or oppose. Current presidents of Belarus and the US were highly similar to Tony Blair as discovered by Nhandara (2015). During his premiership, Blair has maintained generally optimistic and cooperative perception of the geopolitical atmosphere, as well as had low sense of control over historical development (Nhandara, 2015, p. 49)—same as Lukašenka and Trump. He also possessed similar inclinations to utilisation of means, including the radical ones (Nhandara, 2015, p. 49). Nykänen's (2016, p. 282) research, in turn, suggests that Angela Merkel could potentially be considered way more of a strong(wo)man than both leaders under consideration: her P-4, or sense of control over historical development, was proved to be very high at the value of no less than 0.8 throughout the entire period of her governing. However, her perception of the world system and means of addressing it have been way softer than those of Lukašenka and Trump, with the significant

inclination to support and cooperate (Nykänen, 2016, p. 282). Finally, perhaps the democratic leader most similar to Lukašenka and Trump was George W. Bush as proven in Renshon's (2008) analysis. His similarly positive and optimistic view of the international system coexisted with either the same or slightly higher sense of control over historical development as in Lukašenka and Trump (Renshon, 2008, p. 834). He also had similar tendency to reward or punish, with the former one being less pronounced (Renshon, 2008, p. 834). Hence, this thesis has not found enough evidence to argue that Lukašenka and Trump had been significantly more or less strongman than the selected democratic leaders.

What concerns their authoritarian counterparts, Lukašenka and Trump were either similar or more strongman than they. While the research by Dyson and Parent (2018, p. 88) provides a useful insight into Putin's operational code, it also compares this OC to those of contemporary mainstream and 'rogue' leaders. In that perspective, Putin, Lukašenka and Trump were closer to mainstream leaders than to the rogue ones, especially in their perception of the political universe and the utility of means (Dyson and Parent, 2018, p. 88). At the same time, Putin's sense of control over historical development was higher, although not strikingly (Dyson and Parent, 2018, p. 88). On the other hand, Lukašenka and Trump seemed to be more strongmen than the current China's leader Xi Jinping and his predecessor Hu Jintao: their P-4 indexes almost doubled those of the Chinese party secretaries, while both Trump and Lukašenka had less cooperative approach to achieving goals (He & Feng, 2013, p. 225).

In terms of consistency and learning, the considered leaders of authoritarian states appeared generally more fluctuant in their beliefs than the democratic ones. Thus, while Tony Blair did not experience any statistically significant learning throughout the time of his governing at all (Nhandara, 2015, p. 49), Angela Merkel has experienced a highly limited one. In particular, she has grown considerably more likely to appeal and promise, while also has seen a slight increase in punishing tendency by her second chancellor term (Nykänen, 2016, p. 189). Her philosophical beliefs have also transformed to mark a more friendly overview of the political universe, however, her sense of control over historical development remained unchanged (Nykänen, 2016, p. 186). A democratic leader deemed most similar to Lukašenka and Trump in the previous paragraphs—George W. Bush—has experienced the most notable learning. His overview of nature of political universe has fluctuated back and forth from somewhat friendly to definitely friendly, while his realisation of political values varied from mixed to optimistic (Renshon, 2008, p. 834). Notably, those fluctuations did not always coincide and

when a change in one index occurred there might not have been a shift in the other one (Renshon, 2008, p. 834). At the same time, his sense of control over historical development remained relatively stable, with only a one-time drop from 0.32 to 0.25 value (Renshon, 2008, p. 834). No drastic transformation of the means utility has occurred (Renshon, 2008, p. 834).

As for the Russian president and Chinese general secretaries, they proved to have generally higher levels of inconsistency in terms of their operational codes. The subsection 1.2.2 has already discussed their OCs in details, which is why this paragraph will not be repeating the same discoveries again. It is, however, necessary to emphasise that Dyson and Parent (2018) indeed named Putin an opportunist, while according to He and Feng (2013, p. 228), the previous Chinese leader, Hu Jintao, has experienced a highly notable learning throughout the years of his rule, especially in terms of the means utility and philosophical beliefs. Unfortunately, He and Feng's (2013) study did not provide an insight into Xi Jinping's learning as he has just assumed power when it appeared, yet limited evidence of learning at Xi's side may be found in the bachelor project by Van der Heijden (2018). This research suggests that both philosophical and instrumental beliefs of Xi have transformed over different phases of his rule and did not appear internally consistent (Van der Heijden, 2018, p. 22).

Therefore, it is visible that neither Lukašenka nor Trump fall strictly under any pattern of learning similar to the other considered leaders. They certainly have not manifested a degree of learning similar to the one of Hu Jintao or Putin, yet transformation of their instrumental beliefs appeared higher than in Merkel and Blair. In that sense, they are also different from Bush who appeared similar to them in terms of the general profile, but did not experience any learning at all in terms of his instrumental beliefs. These findings allow to deduce two major conclusions relevant for the research questions of this thesis. Firstly, the operational codes of Lukašenka and Trump are relatively unique in terms of consistency as neither they resemble the ones of democratic leaders, nor of authoritarian ones. Secondly, however, there is a significant degree of variation among the OCs of all leaders operating in different systems, including particularly in their strongman tendencies and consistency of beliefs. Hence, it would be fair to claim that every leader considered in this analysis is somewhat unique as they do not strictly fall under general categorisations.

Conclusions and Discussion

This dissertation has examined the belief systems of two political leaders, presidents of Belarus and the United States—Aliaksandr Lukašenka and Donald Trump, respectively. The conducted analysis has offered replies to the posed research questions and fulfilled the set objectives. In particular, the following features of strongman operation have been revealed. Firstly, the study has confirmed what appeared logical based on the findings of the previously existing literature—political strongmen are different from each other and cannot be treated from a perspective which merely emphasises their illiberal tendencies. Despite multiple and notable similarities exist in the operational codes of Lukašenka and Trump, these two leaders still differ in more minor yet not less important aspects. Both presidents appear to possess a restricted sense of control over historical development: they have not been willing or ready to express hegemonic attitude to their foreign policy decisions and aimed to maintain a chance for cooperation even in their most radical and seemingly conflictual rhetoric. In that sense, they have resembled the features of numerous other leaders across the world, both democratic and authoritarian ones. However, they have also diverged significantly from the other leaders. This dissertation therefore has not found any solid evidence that there had been particular operational code features that would make a typical strongman and distinguish one from a democratic leader.

At the same time, this thesis has used the experience of past papers to identify those features which *should* make a strongman, and both Lukašenka and Trump lacked most of them in their operational codes. In addition to the already mentioned weak perception of the historical control, the considered presidents have not manifested any significant tendency to adopt radical means of action, such as punishing or threatening, or—on the other pole—rewarding. Instead, they displayed a very high tendency to utilise the most neutral of the OC means: appealing. It has appeared yet that Lukašenka and Trump remained populist and at least relatively charismatic in their foreign policy-related speeches. Belarus' president often spoke from a position of the father of the nation, claimed to represent its sovereignty and importance, although emphasised the historical ties between Belarus and its partners, as well as brotherly relations—especially with Russia. He used a considerable amount of simple and catchy words, presumably to showcase his similarity to ordinary citizens and attract their approval. The US president also used simple rhetoric that would be easily understood by any American, as well as emphasised the need to protect national interests with simple means of action: it should have

presumably attracted his electorate. Populism and charisma, nevertheless, have appeared not to be the most salient features of a strongman as they should coincide with tough policies and controlling behaviour to represent the leadership profile mentioned above. Hence, although Lukašenka and Trump are certainly populists in terms of their foreign policy, they are not strongmen in this regard.

The beliefs of the considered presidents appeared relatively consistent over time and context, but there have also been periods of divergence, speech genres mattered tangibly and a decent extent of learning occurred throughout the considered years of governing. In particular, while both Lukašenka and Trump maintained stable philosophical beliefs, their instrumental ones fluctuated with a various degree of significance. Lukašenka has grown more friendly and optimistic in his strategic approach and tactical pursuit of goals, while Trump has manifested less consistency: his tactical pursuit of goals has become more optimistic, yet the strategic approach has become less friendly. Those fluctuations also varied by states and leaders addressed: both presidents appeared to possess a more positive overview of China than Russia, while in Trump's case these degrees varied drastically depending on a genre of speech. It seemed that precisely the pressure which domestic political and geopolitical environment imposed on Trump mattered in the aforementioned divergence as he had to adapt his genuine beliefs according to the cost-benefit calculation sourcing from the context. Lukašenka, on the other hand, had less constrains as heading the highly centralised autocratic system at home, he only needed to adapt his beliefs to improve the chances of receiving financial support from both China and Russia. Therefore, in general, Trump appeared to be a less consistent leader with consequently greater probability of being an opportunist.

The usefulness of these findings to the society and academia is twofold. On the one hand, the fact that there is no single consistent image of a strongman means that it is not possible to use the results for predictive and preventive purposes. According to what has become known, one can only identify a strongman after s/he proves to be the one with their actions. It also means that there cannot be a universal strategy or at least a template that could be used in democratic resistance against illiberal leaders. On the other hand, however, the fact that an operational code of every strongman is different means that the methods of this research can help structuring a specific strategy against every separate strongman who is in power. The known peculiarities of their beliefs may be addressed pointedly instead of tackling those features generally considered common in such leaders: in reality, they may lack and the strategy would end

up inviable. Moreover, this research has confirmed that at least some strongmen—such as Lukašenka and Trump—manifest consistent philosophical beliefs regarding the international system, and they are not potentially as 'strong' as those which they manifest domestically. It means that the international influence should play a significant role in the struggle against strongmanship. Such leaders often depend on the external support and cooperation as otherwise they risk underperforming domestically: in Lukašenka's case, lack of foreign partners would result in inability to support state economy; in Trump's case, the lack of foreign partners would mean isolation and hence dissatisfaction of numerous voters. The consistency of philosophical beliefs, in turn, means that they could also be targeted when creating a strategy of resistance: as the evidence suggests, surrounding context indeed impacts instrumental beliefs of those leaders as they aim to adapt them to satisfy their philosophical aspirations.

The events currently ongoing in the political life of the considered states suggest that foreign aspects may indeed play a notable role in determining sustainability of their illiberal leaders. This year, Lukašenka faced the unprecedentedly vibrant and competitive presidential election: as he arrested his major competitors and put increasing pressure at the civil society, the country has seen a spike of mass protests and consolidation of democratic resistance (Azarkevich, 2020; Ilyushina, 2020). The incumbent president has blamed Russia for intervening into the campaign and intensified the relations with the European Union (Kudrytski, 2020). At the same time, multiple experts agree that the international society may play an important role in determining whether Lukašenka can maintain power (see e,g. Kłysiński, 2020, as cited in Otroshchenkov, 2020; Oidekivi, 2020; Shraibman, 2020). The argument is that his regime requires international financial support and cannot survive without it, yet deterioration of the relations with both the EU and Russia would put the continuation of this support under threat (Oidekivi, 2020). Lukašenka may potentially find help in alternative sources such as China, Qatar or the UAE, but this, again, would depend on how he plans the foreign actions (Belsat, 2019; Stratfor, 2020; Shraibman, 2020). For Trump, his desire to play a strong hand with both his opponent and allies also poses a threat to the future governing. He has already faced the impeachment initiation after supposedly pressuring the president of Ukraine with military assistance, whereas Trump's tensed relations with NATO has met both international and domestic dissatisfaction (BBC, 2020; The New York Times, 2019; Townsend & Kendall-Taylor, 2019). Therefore—similarly to what Treisman (2020) suggests in his piece about authoritarian mistakes and subsequent democratisation—it seems that the way in which strongmen structure their foreign policy indeed matters for their sustainability.

The findings of this study correlate with the existing literature in several compelling and potentially challenging ways. Firstly, in oppose to what Walker, Schafer and Young (1998, 1999, as cited in Walker et al 2003, p. 221), as well as Renshon (2008) argued, instrumental beliefs of the considered leaders have proved to be more volatile than their philosophical beliefs. In fact, in terms of their philosophical beliefs, both Lukašenka and Trump almost corresponded to the initial speculations by George (1969) and Holsti (1977) that belief systems were fixed. Thus, Lukašenka usually reacted on challenges to his philosophical aspirations exactly by switching means of their achievement. For example, instead of rethinking the brotherly nature of Russo-Belarusian relations at all, he would rather claim that the situation forced him to adopt different measures to maintain them. The oil and diary conflicts represent it clearly as he supposedly had to act tougher in order to save the geopolitical atmosphere as he saw it. For Trump, the pattern of his beliefs fluctuation was similar. As he praised cooperation with China on the trade deal right after calling for more conflictual attitude to this state and imposing tariffs, he still maintained the same overview of their relations—which is that China was trying to damage the US economically and his goal was to maintain the dominance of the latter by any means. Notably, when the change in the leaders' beliefs occurred, it was not 'of a very low magnitude' as Renshon (2008, p. 827) supposed.

Secondly, this research has allowed to check the prognoses which appeared in the operational code analyses of Donald Trump prior to him becoming president. While Walker et al (2018) confirmed his sense of control over historical development (P-4) to be at the level of 0.3 during the election campaign, this study has revealed a mean score of 0.25 during the presidency. Although not very significantly, Trump's sense of control over historical development hence decreased with acquiring the position he currently occupies. It suggests that Trump maintains generally consistent overview of the historical control with only a minor effect on it caused by the presidential duties. As this level of control is still small, however, it does not allow this research to conclude that Trump's foreign policy beliefs are the ones of a strongman based on that criteria. In this regard, he is comparable to an average world leader of a democratic state. Hence, the literature concerns over Trump becoming a strongman did not stand as according to the findings of this research. Considering that these findings are limited though, it is possible for completely opposite conclusions to follow from the studies done in different settings or with alternative data. That is why this dissertation concludes with providing recommendations for further research, which—it believes—should complement the conducted analysis and enrich the literature concerning illiberal politicians and their operational codes.

4.1 Recommendations for Further Research

Firstly, as this research has illustrated that those leaders who are considered to be strongman in terms of their domestic policies may turn out being not as strong when dealing with foreign issues, it is believed that the academia needs to further explore potential differences in the ways that leaders choose to address internal and external contexts. It should not only limit to presumably illiberal politicians or systems, but also expand into liberal and democratic settings. As according to one of the key research objectives of this study, knowing the differences between leaders' approaches to domestic and foreign policies may help producing strategies to address the issues existing with their governing schemes. For autocracies, that would be helping resistance movements and for democracies, tackling less fundamental systemic issues. For example, if a leader is found to be more cooperative abroad than at home, third states may choose to pressure such actors when they manifest illiberal tendencies by only cooperating if they return or embark on a liberal path. In order for such findings to be conclusive, however, further studies would need to deduce an efficient methodology of comparing beliefs concerning domestic and foreign policy, as the operational code analysis was only meant to deal with the latter one.

Secondly, it would significantly improve the understanding of Lukašenka's and Trump's beliefs if further researches look at how these two leaders depict themselves in relation to their democratic counterparts. Unfortunately, the limited time resources and size of this research have only allowed to focus on two states investigating the presidents' OC related to them, and due to how extensively Trump and Lukašenka address Russia and China in their speeches, these particular states have been selected. Perhaps the most vivid limitation of this approach, however, has been that beliefs and behaviour models consequently concerned exclusively authoritarian states with the other strongmen in head of them. At the same time, both Lukašenka and Trump have vibrant and important relations with—for instance—the EU, as a whole and with its separate members, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Georgia. It seems likely that their operational codes would look different when building foreign policy with the aforementioned actors. In fact, CNN (Bernstein, 2020) has most recently reported that Trump's way of speech and behaviour differed significantly during the phone calls with authoritarian and democratic leaders, according to the 'officials intimately familiar with the contents of the conversations'. If so, it could challenge the claims of this research regarding the consistency of the leaders' beliefs, their opportunism and strongmanship.

Thirdly, it is thought-provoking that Nai and Toros (2020) revealed the significant correlation between psychopathic traits of character and strongmanship at the same time as the review of Trump's and Lukašenka's biographies revealed how widespread it was for non-official biographies to highlight exactly this psychiatric condition in the considered leaders. This study itself has not provided sufficient evidence to refute or confirm any of these claims, yet Nai and Toros's (2020) paper indeed linked Donald Trump to an increased level of psychopathy. They did not use the same methods of analysis as this research, which is why it is difficult to comment with confidence how accurate this finding might be. Regardless, however, it would be of a particularly high value to conduct further psychological researches of Trump and Lukašenka dealing with this exact trait. The reason is that being a psychopath poses a significant risk to the well-being of people around such person (Howell, 2018), which seems especially dangerous if this person is the head of a state. Those studies hence would require to deduce a highly precise conceptualisation of 'psychopathy' as this term appears ambiguous and often used outside the clinical understanding.

Fourthly, the research of different speech genres seems to be a prominent area of analysis for linguistic and psychological literature in general, especially when dealing with political actors. The fact that both Trump and Lukašenka have adopted the rhetoric that would be different in content and even character depending on who they address and in which context suggests that there might be deeper processes behind this phenomenon. It is especially notable that Trump used more complex rhetoric in his Twitter than in interviews. It seems unlikely that significant intervention of speech-writers occurred in both instances, which is why the switch in tone should account precisely for the genre. In this sense, however, it is not surprising that Trump's annual addresses consisted of the most complex rhetoric of all as this was probably due to the extensive help of speech-writers. Lukašenka has manifested lower fluctuation of his rhetoric: his annual addresses distinguished from the other genres, but otherwise the president maintained similar manner of speech across informal occasions and interviews. At the same time, during the interviews, Lukašenka evidently tried to look more sophisticated than in informal speeches: he appealed to his qualifications, supposedly insider information, numbers and statistics. The reasons behind such occurrences yet remain unknown, therefore a more profound insight into this matter should appear in further studies.

Finally, and perhaps predictably, this paper makes a general call for more comparative studies of operational codes of illiberal leaders. This study is only one of few that aimed to unveil the

differences and particular features of strongman character, yet it believes that doing so on a consistent basis should contribute significantly to the struggle against autocratic tendencies across the globe. Knowing more precisely how and why such political actors behave in a way they do should help developing more scrutinised ways of competing with them, fostering democratic developments in the formal autocracies and preventing the decline of liberalism that is now happening in democratic states.

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