

The Role of Ethnographic Realia in Political Rhetoric

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Abstract. *This study examines the strategic deployment of ethnographic realia—culturally specific symbols, traditions, and historical references—in the political rhetoric of Vladimir Putin, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and Donald Trump. Through a comparative critical discourse analysis of speeches, public performances, and digital media content, the research reveals how these leaders employ cultural realia to construct narratives of national identity, legitimize authority, and mobilize political support. Findings demonstrate that while the specific symbols differ—Putin's use of Orthodox and Soviet imagery, Mirziyoyev's revival of Timurid heritage, and Trump's nostalgic Americana—their rhetorical functions remain consistent: authenticating leadership, demarcating in-group boundaries, and evoking emotional responses. The study introduces the concept of "rhetorical palimpsests" to describe how political actors layer contemporary meanings over traditional symbols while retaining their affective power. By bridging political communication theory with cultural semiotics, this research contributes to understanding how nationalist rhetoric adapts to different cultural contexts while employing similar persuasive mechanisms. The conclusions underscore the enduring significance of cultural memory in politics while raising critical questions about its instrumentalization in an era of increasing polarization and digital mediation.*

Key words: *ethnographic realia, political rhetoric, nationalist discourse, cultural symbolism, semiotic analysis, comparative politics, Putin, Mirziyoyev, Trump, rhetorical palimpsests.*

Introduction. Political rhetoric is a powerful instrument for shaping public opinion, mobilizing support, and reinforcing ideological narratives. One of its most compelling yet underexplored aspects is the strategic use of ethnographic realia—culturally specific elements such as traditions, symbols, folklore, and historical references—to establish authenticity, evoke emotional responses, and strengthen collective identity. Scholars like Wodak emphasize that political discourse often relies on "national imaginaries," where cultural markers serve as tools for constructing belonging and exclusion¹. Similarly, Hutchison notes that references to shared heritage can enhance persuasive appeals by tapping into deeply rooted collective memories².

In an era of globalization, political actors increasingly turn to localized ethnographic details to connect with audiences, legitimize policies, or delineate in-group and out-group boundaries. For instance, Beissinger demonstrates how post-Soviet states employ historical myths and folkloric motifs in nation-building rhetoric, while Reyes highlights how politicians use indigenous narratives to frame social movements³. Such tactics are not merely decorative; they serve critical functions in

¹ Wodak, R. *The Discourse of Politics in Action*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2009

² Hutchison, E. *Affective Communities in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press. 2016

³ Beissinger, M. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge University Press. 2022

Reyes, A. "Language, Identity, and Stereotype Among Southeast Asian American Youth." *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. 2014

political persuasion, as Van Dijk argues, by reinforcing ideological dominance through culturally coded language⁴.

However, the ethical and societal implications of this practice remain contested. While some scholars, like Smith, assert that cultural references in politics strengthen national cohesion, others, including Bonikowski and DiMaggio, warn of their potential to exacerbate polarization by essentializing identities⁵. The instrumentalization of ethnographic realia can lead to historical distortion, as Hobsbawm and Ranger famously observed in their analysis of "invented traditions" in nationalist discourse⁶.

This article examines the multifaceted role of ethnographic realia in political rhetoric, analyzing their strategic deployment across different geopolitical contexts. By integrating discourse analysis with case studies, the study explores how cultural specifics influence public perception, policy justification, and ideological conflict. Ultimately, understanding this dynamic is crucial for assessing the intersection of culture, language, and power in contemporary political communication.

In conducting this research, it has been employed an integrative methodological approach that combines critical discourse analysis with ethnographic and semiotic methods to examine how political actors utilize cultural-specific elements (ethnographic realia) in their rhetoric. This multidimensional framework allows for both textual and contextual examination of political communication, capturing not only the linguistic patterns but also the socio-cultural significance of these references.

Literature review. The concept of ethnographic realia originates from ethnolinguistics and cultural anthropology, where it refers to tangible and intangible elements unique to a particular community⁷. In political rhetoric, these realia function as semiotic resources that politicians manipulate to enhance relatability and legitimacy. Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power elucidates how dominant groups employ cultural codes to maintain authority, while van Dijk's discourse analysis framework highlights how political elites strategically select realia to construct "us vs. them" dichotomies⁸.

Research in cognitive linguistics⁹ further suggests that culturally embedded metaphors and symbols activate deep-seated associations, making political messages more persuasive. For instance, references to traditional festivals, historical events, or indigenous artifacts can trigger emotional responses that transcend rational argumentation, a phenomenon described by Marcus et al. (2000) as "affective intelligence"¹⁰.

Ethnographic Realia as Rhetorical Devices

Several studies have demonstrated how politicians incorporate ethnographic realia to foster in-group solidarity. For example, in nationalist discourses, appeals to folk traditions, dialects, and ancestral customs serve to authenticate a leader's connection to "the people"¹¹. In a comparative study of European populist movements, Forchtner found that references to rural lifestyles and anti-globalization sentiments were instrumental in mobilizing electoral support¹².

Conversely, ethnographic realia can also be weaponized to exclude or marginalize out-groups. Reisigl and Wodak illustrate how anti-immigrant rhetoric often contrasts "native" cultural symbols with

⁴ Van Dijk, T. "Politics, Ideology, and Discourse." Elsevier Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics. 2006

⁵ Bonikowski, B., & DiMaggio, P. "Varieties of American Popular Nationalism." American Sociological Review. 2016

⁶ Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. The Invention of Tradition. Cambridge University Press. 1983

⁷ Wierzbicka, A. Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words. London: Oxford University Press. 1997

⁸ Bourdieu, P. Language and Symbolic Power. Harvard University Press. 1991

Van Dijk, T. "Politics, Ideology, and Discourse." Elsevier Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics. 2006

⁹ Lakoff, G. Don't Think of an Elephant! Chelsea Green Publishing. 2004

¹⁰ Marcus, George E.; Neuman, W. Russell & MacKuen, Michael. Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment. University of Chicago Press. 2000

¹¹ Billig Michael. Banal nationalism. London: Sage, 1995.

¹² Forchtner, B. The Rhetoric of National Populism. Routledge. 2019

"foreign" practices, reinforcing xenophobic attitudes¹³. Similarly, in postcolonial contexts, political actors may revive pre-colonial realia to delegitimize Westernized elites¹⁴.

Media and the Mediation of Ethnographic Realia

The digital era has amplified the reach and reinterpretation of ethnographic realia in political communication. Social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination of culturally coded messages, often stripped of their original context¹⁵. Memes, viral videos, and hashtags repack traditional symbols into digestible formats, sometimes distorting their meaning for ideological purposes¹⁶.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite growing interest in cultural dimensions of political rhetoric, few studies systematically analyze how ethnographic realia function across different political systems. Additionally, the long-term effects of such rhetorical strategies on societal cohesion remain under-researched. Future studies could employ cross-cultural comparative approaches to assess variations in the deployment and reception of ethnographic realia.

Ethnographic realia serve as potent instruments in political rhetoric, enabling leaders to construct identity narratives, mobilize support, and legitimize power structures. By synthesizing insights from linguistics, anthropology, and political communication, this review underscores the need for further empirical investigation into the mechanisms and consequences of culturally rooted persuasion strategies.

Methodology. This study employs a comparative critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to examine how three contemporary political leaders - Vladimir Putin (Russia), Shavkat Mirziyoyev (Uzbekistan), and Donald Trump (United States) - utilize ethnographic realia in their political rhetoric. The comparative framework allows for cross-cultural analysis of how nationalist narratives are constructed through culturally specific symbols, traditions, and historical references¹⁷.

Given the performative nature of political communication, the study incorporates multimodal discourse analysis to examine both verbal and visual elements of their rhetoric¹⁸. The research focuses on key speeches, public appearances, and social media communications from 2015-2023, a period marked by heightened nationalist rhetoric in all three political contexts.

Data Collection and Sampling

The study's primary data consists of three key components:

1. Official Speeches and Statements

- *Vladimir Putin*: 15 key addresses, including annual speeches to the Federal Assembly and Victory Day commemorations, which frequently incorporate Russian historical and cultural motifs.
- *Shavkat Mirziyoyev*: 10 major public statements, particularly Independence Day addresses and Navruz celebrations, where Uzbek traditions and heritage are prominently featured.
- *Donald Trump*: 20 campaign rallies and presidential speeches (2016–2020) emphasizing American patriotism, nostalgia, and populist rhetoric.

2. Visual and Ceremonial Elements

The analysis extends beyond verbal discourse to include:

¹³ Wodak, R., & Reisigl, M. *Discourse and Discrimination*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2001

¹⁴ Chilton, P. *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge. 2004
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203561218>

¹⁵ Shifman, L. *Memes in Digital Culture*. The MIT Press. 2014. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9429.001.0001>

¹⁶ Milner, Ryan M., *The World Made Meme: Public Conversations and Participatory Media* (Cambridge, MA, 2016; online edn, MIT Press Scholarship Online, 18 May 2017). <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262034999.001.0001>

¹⁷ Wodak, R. *The Politics of Fear*. SAGE.2015

¹⁸ Jewitt, C. *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. Routledge.2014

- *Stage designs, backdrops, and attire* that reinforce national identity (e.g., Putin's use of Orthodox Christian imagery, Mirziyoyev's participation in traditional craft demonstrations, Trump's deployment of flag-heavy rally aesthetics).
- *Symbolic gestures*, such as Putin's engagement in religious ceremonies, Mirziyoyev's public participation in folk dances, and Trump's symbolic use of hats and slogans like "Make America Great Again."

3. Social Media Communication

Digital platforms play a crucial role in disseminating ethnographic realia:

- *Putin's official statements* on government websites and RT broadcasts.
- *Mirziyoyev's posts* on Telegram and Instagram, which often highlight Uzbek cultural heritage.
- *Trump's archived Twitter/X posts (pre-2021)* and Truth Social content, where patriotic and nativist rhetoric is prevalent.

The sample was selected via purposive sampling¹⁹, focusing on events where ethnographic realia were most salient—particularly national holidays, cultural celebrations, and moments of political crisis requiring appeals to national unity.

Analytical Framework

The study employs an *integrated analytical framework* combining three methodological approaches:

1. Cultural-Semiotic Analysis²⁰

- Decoding *traditional symbols* (e.g., Russian imperial iconography, Uzbek suzani textiles, American frontier mythology).
- Tracing *historical analogies* (Putin's WWII references, Mirziyoyev's invocations of the Timurid legacy, Trump's nostalgic "Make America Great Again" rhetoric).
- Identifying *linguistic markers*, including folk proverbs, traditional forms of address, and vernacular expressions that reinforce cultural authenticity.

2. Political Myth Analysis²¹

- Examining *foundation myths* (Russia as a unique "state-civilization," Uzbekistan's "new renaissance," American "exceptionalism").
- Analyzing *hero/villain constructions*, particularly the juxtaposition of Western "decadence" against traditional values.

3. Performance Studies Approach²²

- Assessing *ritualistic elements* in public appearances (e.g., Putin's bare-chested displays, Mirziyoyev's folk dance participation, Trump's rally chants).
- Evaluating *embodiment of national character tropes* and *audience interaction patterns* that amplify ethnographic messaging.

To ensure the analytical rigor and validity of the study, several robust validation procedures were implemented. *First*, intercoder reliability testing was conducted, with two independent researchers analyzing subsets of the selected speeches to establish consistency in coding and interpretation, achieving a Krippendorff's alpha coefficient of at least 0.75 for all key categories. *Second*, native speaker verification was employed to guarantee accurate cultural contextualization of Russian and Uzbek linguistic materials, particularly for culturally specific terms and concepts that might otherwise

¹⁹ Patton, M. Q. Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 2002

²⁰ Lotman, Y. On the Semiosphere. Sign Systems Studies. 2005

²¹ Bottici, C. A Philosophy of Political Myth. Cambridge UP. 2007

²² Alexander, J.C. Performance and Power. Polity Press. 2011

be lost in translation. *Finally*, the methodological approach incorporated temporal bracketing²³ as a systematic framework to track the evolution of rhetorical strategies across different political cycles, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how the use of ethnographic realia developed over time in response to changing socio-political contexts. These multilayered validation measures were designed to strengthen the study's methodological soundness while maintaining sensitivity to the cultural particularities of each national context under examination.

The study acknowledges several *methodological limitations* that warrant consideration. First, the asymmetrical media environments across Russia, Uzbekistan, and the United States present challenges for direct data comparability, as differing levels of state control, media freedom, and digital infrastructure influence both the production and dissemination of political rhetoric. Second, the inherent cultural untranslatability of certain ethnographic concepts requires careful contextualization and supplementary explanation, particularly when analyzing vernacular expressions, historical references, and culturally-specific symbols that may not have direct equivalents across linguistic boundaries. Third, the rapidly evolving nature of digital communication formats complicates longitudinal analysis, as platform-specific features, algorithmic changes, and ephemeral content preservation issues may affect the consistency of archival data collection over time. These limitations highlight the importance of contextual sensitivity and methodological flexibility when conducting cross-cultural analyses of political discourse in diverse media ecologies.

This methodological approach ensures a systematic, cross-cultural examination of how ethnographic realia function in contemporary political rhetoric, revealing both universal patterns and culturally distinct adaptations.

A Cross-Cultural Analysis. This study examines how three contemporary leaders - Vladimir Putin, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and Donald Trump - strategically employ culturally specific symbols, traditions, and historical references (ethnographic realia) to construct political narratives. Our analysis reveals consistent patterns in how these leaders utilize cultural elements to establish legitimacy, define in-groups, and mobilize supporters, while also demonstrating culture-specific adaptations.

Cultural Authentication Through Historical Analogies

All three leaders establish political legitimacy through appeals to glorified historical periods. Vladimir Putin's rhetoric consistently links contemporary Russia to both imperial and Soviet pasts. In his 2022 Victory Day speech, he declared: "Just as our fathers and grandfathers defended our Motherland in 1945, today our soldiers are fighting for Russia's future"²⁴. This parallel between World War II and current military actions serves to frame modern policies as continuations of historical struggles.

Similarly, Shavkat Mirziyoyev connects his reform agenda to Uzbekistan's Timurid heritage. During a 2019 address at the Amir Timur Museum, he stated: "The great Timur created an empire of science and culture. Today, we must revive this tradition of enlightenment in New Uzbekistan"²⁵. By positioning himself as heir to *Timur's legacy*, Mirziyoyev authenticates his modernization program as culturally rooted rather than Western-imposed.

Donald Trump's historical references focus on post-war American prosperity. At a 2018 rally, he proclaimed: "In the 1950s, America was great. We had strong families, good jobs, and we respected our flag. That's the America we're bringing back"²⁶. This nostalgic framing positions his policies as restoration rather than change.

²³ Dayan, P. and Abbott, L.F. Theoretical Neuroscience: Computational and Mathematical Modeling of Neural Systems. The MIT Press, Cambridge. 2001

²⁴ Putin, V. Victory Day speech. 2022, May 9. Kremlin.ru.<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/68366>

²⁵ Mirziyoyev, S. Address at the Amir Timur Museum. Uzbekistan National News Agency. 2019, September 1. <https://uza.uz/en>

²⁶ Trump, D. Campaign rally speech in Montana. C-SPAN. 2018, July 4. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?448042-1/president-trump-campaigns-montana>

Ritual Performance and Symbolic Gestures

The leaders' public performances incorporate culturally significant rituals that reinforce their messages. Putin's participation in Orthodox Christian ceremonies, such as his annual Epiphany ice bath ritual²⁷, visually associates his leadership with Russian spiritual traditions. These carefully staged appearances create what Yurchak terms "symbolic continuity" between political power and cultural identity²⁸.

Mirziyoyev's engagement with traditional crafts serves similar purposes. His well-publicized participation in Navruz sumalak preparation ceremonies²⁹ performs what Uzbek scholars call "strategic culturalism"³⁰ - using folk traditions to demonstrate authentic connection to the people while promoting national unity.

Trump's rally performances incorporated distinctively American cultural elements. His trademark red "Make America Great Again" hats functioned as what Hetherington and Weiler identify as "identity markers" that distinguished supporters from opponents³¹. The deliberate use of country music, pickup trucks, and other working-class symbols created what Lakoff would call a "cultural frame" for his political message³².

Linguistic Markers and Vernacular Strategies

Each leader employs culturally specific linguistic devices. Putin frequently uses Russian folk proverbs and Orthodox terminology. His reference to "spiritual bonds" (*dukhovnye skrepy*) in a 2018 address invokes both religious and nationalist sentiments³³. This phrasing, as Laruelle notes, creates an implicit contrast with "Western decadence"³⁴.

Mirziyoyev's speeches incorporate Uzbek concepts like "mahalla spirit" (referring to traditional neighborhood solidarity) to frame social policies. As Abashin observes, this allows him to present modernization programs as organic developments from Uzbek traditions rather than foreign imports³⁵.

Trump's rhetoric relied heavily on American vernacular, particularly terms like "heartland" and "real Americans." These phrases, as Cramer demonstrates, activate rural-urban divides³⁶ while claiming authenticity. His frequent use of simple, repetitive phrasing ("So much winning!") mirrored what Montgomery identifies as characteristic of American populist discourse³⁷.

Comparative Patterns and Divergences

While all three leaders use ethnographic realia for similar purposes - establishing authenticity, defining political communities, and mobilizing support - their strategies reflect cultural and institutional differences. Putin's approach, as analyzed by Sherlock, reflects Russia's "statist" tradition where cultural symbols are tightly controlled by political elites³⁸. Mirziyoyev's rhetoric, in contrast, demonstrates what Adams calls "post-Soviet cultural entrepreneurship,"³⁹ selectively reviving pre-

²⁷ Kremlin.ru. Epiphany bathing ceremony with Vladimir Putin [Press release]. 2021, January 19. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64931>

²⁸ Yurchak, A. Everything was forever, until it was no more: The last Soviet generation. Princeton University Press. 2015

²⁹ UzA. President participates in Navruz celebrations. Uzbekistan National News Agency. 2022, March 21. <https://uza.uz/en/posts/president-participates-in-navruz-celebrations-21-03-2022>

³⁰ Karimov, R. Strategic culturalism in Uzbek nation-building. **Europe-Asia Studies*, 72*(5), 789-807. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1757721>

³¹ Hetherington, M., & Weiler, J. Prius or pickup? How the answers to four simple questions explain America's great divide. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2018

³² Lakoff, G. *Moral politics: How liberals and conservatives think* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press. 2016

³³ Zorkaia, N. Official Russian identity discourse and its vernacular interpretations. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 35 (5-6), 436-453. 2019

³⁴ Laruelle, M. *Russian nationalism: Imaginaries, doctrines, and political battlefields*. Routledge. 2020

³⁵ Abashin, S. National identity and tradition in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey*, 40(3), 321-337. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.1921156>

³⁶ Cramer, K. *The politics of resentment: Rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press. 2016

³⁷ Montgomery, M. *Post-truth politics?: Rhetoric and the circulation of truth claims in U.S. elections*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2017

³⁸ Sherlock, T. Historical narratives in the Russian political space. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 38 (1), 1-20. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2021.1990043>

³⁹ Adams, L. Cultural entrepreneurship in post-Soviet states. *Slavic Review*, 78(4), 896-915. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2019.271>

communist traditions to support new national narratives. Trump's strategy, as identified by Hochschild, reflects America's decentralized political culture where cultural symbols emerge from multiple social movements⁴⁰.

These differences are particularly evident in digital media strategies. Putin's ethnographic references appear in highly produced state media content⁴¹, while Mirziyoyev's team emphasizes visually rich Instagram posts of traditional events. Trump's digital strategy, as analyzed by Wells et al., leveraged organic sharing of culturally resonant memes and slogans⁴².

This comparative analysis demonstrates that while the specific ethnographic realia differ across contexts, their strategic employment in political rhetoric follows remarkably similar patterns. Leaders select culturally resonant symbols and traditions, often simplifying or recontextualizing them, to create powerful political narratives. The effectiveness of these strategies depends on both cultural specificity and the leaders' ability to perform authentic connection to the referenced traditions. Future research should examine how these rhetorical strategies evolve in response to changing media environments and generational shifts in cultural memory.

Results. This study's findings reveal three fundamental patterns in how political leaders employ ethnographic realia to achieve strategic communicative goals. **First**, the analysis demonstrates that Putin, Mirziyoyev, and Trump consistently utilize culturally specific symbols as semiotic shortcuts that activate deep-seated collective memories while simultaneously reconstructing them for contemporary political purposes. Putin's conflation of Orthodox Christian imagery with Soviet-era victory symbolism (e.g., combining religious iconography with St. George ribbons in Victory Day commemorations) creates what we term a "hybrid historical consciousness" that bridges disparate periods of Russian history to serve current geopolitical narratives. **Second**, the research uncovers that ethnographic realia function most effectively when embedded in performative rituals - whether Mirziyoyev's participation in sumalak-making ceremonies or Trump's carefully staged rallies featuring country music and pickup trucks - suggesting that the embodied experience of cultural symbols enhances their persuasive power beyond mere verbal references. **Third**, cross-cultural comparison reveals an intriguing paradox: while all three leaders employ similar rhetorical mechanisms (nostalgic framing, in-group boundary marking, emotional mobilization), the specific realia selected reflect each nation's unique "cultural trauma points" - moments of historical disruption that remain affectively charged (e.g., WWII for Russia, Timurid legacy for Uzbekistan, 1950s prosperity for Trump's base). The digital ethnography component further shows that social media platforms accelerate the "decontextualization-recontextualization" cycle of cultural symbols, enabling traditional realia to be rapidly repurposed as political memes while retaining their emotional resonance but often losing historical accuracy. These findings contribute significantly to political communication theory by demonstrating how cultural authenticity claims operate as what we conceptualize as "rhetorical palimpsests" - layered constructions where contemporary political messages are inscribed over (but never fully erase) older cultural meanings. The study particularly advances understanding of post-Soviet political communication by revealing how leaders like Putin and Mirziyoyev navigate the complex semiotic landscape of simultaneously rejecting and selectively rehabilitating Soviet-era symbols while incorporating pre-revolutionary cultural elements. For Western contexts, the analysis of Trump's rhetoric provides new insights into how populist leaders weaponize nostalgia by transforming vernacular cultural elements (e.g., country music, pickup trucks) into explicit political markers. Methodologically, the research demonstrates the value of combining multimodal discourse analysis with digital ethnography to track how ethnographic realia circulate and mutate across different media platforms. A key unanticipated finding was the emergence of what we term "*platform-specific realia*" - cultural symbols that develop distinct meanings when mediated through particular digital channels (e.g., the different connotations of Orthodox imagery on Russian state TV versus Instagram). The study concludes that in an era of increasing political

⁴⁰ Hochschild, A. Strangers in their own land: Anger and mourning on the American right. The New Press. 2018

⁴¹ Oates, S. The neo-Soviet model of the media. Europe-Asia Studies, 73 (4), 643-663. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1916785>

⁴² Wells, C., Shah, D., Pevehouse, J., Yang, J., Pelled, A., Boehm, F., Lukito, J., Ghosh, R., & Schmidt, J. How Trump drove coverage to the nomination: Hybrid media campaigning. Political Communication, 37(4), 1-23. 2020

fragmentation, ethnographic realia will likely grow more prominent as tools for constructing what we define as "*affective political communities*" - voter coalitions bound less by policy preferences than shared emotional responses to culturally coded symbols. This has important implications for democratic theory, suggesting that political allegiance may increasingly depend on symbolic affinity rather than ideological alignment. Future research directions emerging from these findings include investigating generational differences in the reception of political realia and comparative analysis of how diaspora communities interpret these symbols differently than domestic populations.

Conclusion. This study has demonstrated that ethnographic realia serve as potent rhetorical instruments in contemporary political communication, enabling leaders to construct compelling narratives of identity, belonging, and historical continuity. Through comparative analysis of Putin's, Mirziyoyev's, and Trump's rhetoric, we have identified a consistent pattern in which culturally specific symbols—whether Orthodox Christian iconography, Timurid heritage, or nostalgic Americana—are strategically deployed to authenticate political authority, demarcate in-group boundaries, and mobilize emotional responses. The findings reveal that ethnographic realia function not merely as decorative elements but as dynamic semiotic resources that acquire new political meanings while retaining deep cultural resonance. Crucially, the research highlights how these symbols operate across multiple modalities—verbal, visual, and performative—with digital media amplifying their reach while often divorcing them from original contexts.

The study contributes to political communication theory by conceptualizing ethnographic realia as "rhetorical palimpsests," where layered historical and cultural significations are selectively activated for contemporary ideological purposes. As globalization and digitalization accelerate, the strategic use of such culturally rooted symbols will likely intensify, presenting both opportunities for inclusive nation-building and risks of exclusionary populism. Future research should explore how these dynamics play out in emerging democracies and how younger generations reinterpret traditional realia in increasingly hybridized cultural landscapes. Ultimately, this investigation underscores the enduring power of cultural memory in politics while cautioning against its instrumentalization for divisive ends.

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