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LIN 350 "Analyzing Linguistic Data"
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<div align="center">Initial Project Description</div>

Research questions

This project will attempt to answer how well thematic shifts in the speeches of United States presidents from the Republican Party correlate with the Party's shifts in policies on immigration since the Eisenhower administration.

The Republican Party underwent major shifts throughout the twentieth century, both in its policies and constituencies. Immigration has become an especially "hot-button" issue in the United States since Donald Trump's election to the presidency in 2016. Trump's populist and nativist rhetoric has frequently included staunchly anti-immigrant rhetoric. However, this general sentiment on immigration has not always been found within the Party, but has dramatically shifted and developed over time.

The general immigration policy positions of each president are known and will be treated as a given. While the legacy of each president's immigration record is complex, the general trend—at least in the past few decades—is that Republican politicians have become more favorable towards restricting immigration, as opposed to the more liberal policies of their Democratic counterparts. We will take as given the assumption that each U.S. president is accurately representative of the average view of their party as a whole.

We predict the earlier, more generally immigrant-friendly Republican presidents tend to use more words related to morality than more recent, generally immigrant-hostile Republican presidents. Meanwhile, generally immigrant-hostile presidents will use more words related to social issues—such as crime or ethnic diversity—than generally immigrant-friendly presidents. Economics-related terms will be more ambiguous, since both immigrant-friendly and immigrant-hostile politicians have historically used economics-related concepts—for instance, benefits from innovation versus wage losses among native U.S. citizens—to support their arguments.

Methods

Presidential speeches tend to cover many topics, and immigration is only one of the many issues on each president's platform. In order to analyze the issue of immigration specifically, excerpts relating to immigration must be isolated from the many other issues presidential speeches cover.

We will use topic modeling to find the excerpts in speeches that address immigration and count the words each president uses in relation to immigration. The themes we will examine in the speeches about immigration include, but are not limited to: economics, social policy, and morality. The relevant counted words will be clustered together into one of these themes. The specific words to be analyzed will be manually chosen and categorized as such.

Data

We will analyze transcripts of speeches from each of the seven Republican presidents since Dwight Eisenhower (which also includes Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan,

George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump). These transcript texts will include, but will not be limited to, excerpts of inaugural addresses, State of the Union Addresses, and other speeches regarding immigration.

The data set will be comprised of extracted plaintext data of the presidential speeches from each of the seven different Republican presidents. We will extract plaintext data of these speeches from online databases. Using a few dozen speeches for each president, which will amount to roughly a few thousand words per president, we will use topic modeling to determine the speech excerpts that relate to immigration.

This project may benefit from an expansion of scope. We could deepen our analysis of the Republican Party by also including speeches made by Republican presidential candidates since Harry Truman who lost in the general election. Alternatively, we could broaden our analysis by examining speeches made by Democratic presidents and Democratic presidential candidates since Truman, which would allow for a comparative analysis between the two parties' shifts in immigration policy.