Travail écrit : "Populism in France : applying discourse theory and critical discourse analysis to compare the populist rhetoric, individual ideology and recuring thematic of Mélenchon and Le Pen during the campaigning meetings held in the context of the 2022 French presidential election"

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Diplôme : Master en sciences politiques, orientation générale
Année académique : 2021-2022
URI/URL : http://hdl.handle.net/2268.2/14724

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Populism in France: applying discourse theory and critical discourse analysis to compare the populist rhetoric, individual ideology and recuring thematic of Mélenchon and Le Pen during the campaigning meetings held in the context of the 2022 French presidential election

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Master Thesis

In Political Science, General Orientation
Option *Global Politics and Political Affairs*

2021-2022

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Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor for always supporting me and giving me precious guidance and advice throughout the whole thesis writing process.

I would also like to thank my readers, Antonio Vlassis and Jérémy Mandin for their helpful contributions.

Lastly, I would like to thank my close family members and friends for their continuous moral support and encouragements. A very special thanks to my mother for her invaluable help.

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Introduction

In Europe, populism has gained major momentum in the last decade (Statista Research Department, 2021; Ivaldi, 2019, p. 27). That trend can be seen under different forms: some countries tend towards left-wing populism while others get seduced by right-wing populism. Some countries have even seen a rise of both left-wing and right-wing populism and that is the case of France which will be the topic of this work as it provides different displays of the populism phenomenon (Ivaldi, 2017, p.1).

This work will have a closer look at the discourses made at campaigning meeting by Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon as part of the presidential race of 2022, more particularly the thematic, ideology and rhetoric mobilized in these. The major question this work will attempt to answer is the following: how does the discourses of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon differ when addressing their electorate? I will attempt to answer that through a discourse comparison of Le Pen and Mélenchon. To answer this main research question, several sub-questions also require answering:

First of all, what is populism and how do both qualify as populists? Who do they consider as "the people" and "the elite"? What are the main themes addressed by both politicians and how do they convey their rhetoric and ideology in their speeches?

My hypotheses on what I expect to find in the discourses are the following:
- Subjects such as feminism or Islam will be over-represented in the discourses of both as they have been over-treated in the recent media I have seen or read, both subjects particularly seem to have been key attention-grasping topics during this election and I expect that to be translated into them coming up quite often in their public speeches;
- Le Pen and Mélenchon will try to demonize each other in their discourses but also demonize other typical establishment figures;
- They will share common positions on subjects such as globalization or the European Union but their remedies to the problems caused by those will be different.

In terms of difficulties faced during the writing of this work, in particular the analysis, the main challenge encountered were to write something coherent and new on the subject. This is why I

chose to mix Discourse Theory (DT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). On top of that, few research has been made on comparing right and left-wing populism in discourses, yet alone in a single country. Political discourse analysis in France typically focuses on formal, quantitative, and "automatic" content analysis paired with critical ideological analysis (Van Dijk, 2001, p.359). This is why mixing approaches felt appropriate and further added to the uniqueness of this thesis. Furthermore, using qualitative data paired with an induction method allows the subtle meanings behind discourse to reveal themselves in a way that quantitative data could not comprehend. This allows a very fine analysis of the language used by the two studied politicians. Instead of looking for a particular item, I let my findings guide the rest of my research and my analysis. Choosing a specific category of discourses, campaigning meetings held for the presidential election of 2022, allows to see how they present themselves to their electorate, the words they use and the topics they chose to elaborate on. Using this kind of analytical framework, even the subjects not mentioned reveal something about the politician, its agenda and ideology. Moreover, by being very restrictive on the amount of data, which could be considered in other settings as a disadvantage is in this case the strength of this work: the analysis reveals small details that would otherwise go unnoticed or unexamined.

Overall, the aim of this dissertation is to offer a new perspective on populism and its articulations in right and left-wing discourses, applied to the case of France using the example of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon and to study what, if anything, sets them apart in their use of discourse and populist rhetoric and ideology. The focus will also be on the central themes brought up by both politicians and how different or similar they are, and in relations to the discourse analysis, if these subjects do mean the same thing for each (empty and floating signifiers).

To start with, a review of the existing literature on populism will be done. That will set out the basis for the rest of this work. Before diving into the different chapters, it is important to set out what exactly means the word "populism" in the context of this dissertation and what are the differences between right and left-wing populism in terms of ideology identified by the literature. This part will also introduce why Le Pen and Mélenchon are commonly designated as populists' politicians and why choosing them particularly for this dissertation. This introduction to the concept of populism and its articulation are crucial to comprehend the rest of this work.

Afterwards for the second chapter, the analytical framework of discourse analysis will be set; first by reviewing the discourse theory of Mouffe and Laclau and then the production of Van Dijk's on critical discourse analysis. Following the introduction of these theories, I will detail my methodology for the analysis of the meeting discourses of Le Pen and Mélenchon.

Before considering the discourse analysis of Le Pen and Mélenchon, there will be a short introductory chapter with key information about each politician, containing a brief review of their history in politics and in the previous presidential elections. All of this should facilitate the comprehension of the characters behind the discourses and who these are intended to.

The next part and fourth chapter of this dissertation will be focused on the discourse analysis of the two carefully chosen politicians: Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon. This part will be more practical. By having a look at their discourses made during campaigning meetings preparing for the 2022 presidential election, I will try to find out what words or themes stand out individually through a thematic analysis and then compare these. Finally, I will carry out an ideological and rhetorical analysis of their discourses.

The research then ends with a small discussion section around the content of the analysis before the final conclusion summarizing the findings of this work as well a reflection upon the limitations encountered and the future research possible.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Before diving into the discourse analysis of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a review of the existing literature will be done, starting with what is meant by the word "populism" in a general context but also which definition(s) will serve as reference in this work, as it is a term used in a variety circumstances and meanings. Following this, the difference between left and right-wing populism will be established as well as why do Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon fall under these two categories.

Populism

Populism has been cited as a new major political trend and has been attributed as the culprit of sizeable global events such as Brexit or the election of Donald Trump (KFCIS, 2017, p.3). Yet, populism is not a new phenomenon. The first known discourses about democracy were already mobilizing populist democracy as a theoretical construct where "the people" (a concept that will be much more developed a few paragraphs later) were seen as the final source of power, the ultimate alternative to monarchy, aristocracy, or tyranny (Pelinka, 2013, p. 1). Populism has therefore a long history into politics that goes further than one could imagine. Nevertheless, it has not always been as prominent on the political scene compared to what can be observed today. In the last decades, in Europe and elsewhere, populism managed to gain major momentum (Ivaldi, 2019, p.27)

Now that the relevance of studying populism has been established, it is important to understand why its eminence could be problematic. Part of the academics consider populism, and more specifically populist parties as a threat to democracy and liberal principles (Albertazzi, Mueller, 2013; Urbinati 2014 as cited in Biard et al., 2021, p. 138). This danger tends to apply more generally to right-wing populism. Literature has classified right-wing populist parties as opposed to democracy, either because they intend to overthrow democratic institutions or because their values are incompatible with a democratic society (Carter, 2011; Mayer 2016; Mudde 2016; Hainsworth 2016; as cited in Debras, 2022, p. 1). Other researchers state that populism, whether right or left, is an "illiberal" ideology because it rejects key elements of representative democracies, namely: electoral competition and institutional check and balances (Golder, 2016; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015, as cited in Vasilopoulos & Jost, 2020, p. 2). In contrast

to these arguments, some also say that, instead, populism is the "correct" path to democracy as it gives a voice to those who were not clearly heard previously (Caramani, 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, as cited in Debras, 2022, p. 2).

The next element worth reviewing is what makes a political party a populist one: its political populist communication type. This communication mode is characterized by opposing on the one hand the people and on the other hand the elites (Biard et al., 2021, p.137-138). Taguieff (2002, p. 39 as cited in Biard et al. 2021, p. 139) defines populism as a polymorph umbrella appellation in reference to a multitude of individuals or political parties systematically implying a semantic blur. In other words, political parties using a populist communication style are always leaving a huge space for interpretation to the public. Populism can be hard to define as many different understandings exist yet scholars, like Mudde (2004, p.543 as cited in Jost & Vasilopoulos, 2020, p. 1 or as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 28) tend to agree that what characterizes populism truly is this typical division between "the pure people" versus the "corrupted elites" and that "politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* ("the general will") of the people". Similarly, De Cleen (2019, p. 19) defines ""the people-as-underdog" and the "elite" as a small and illegitimately powerful group that is argued not to satisfy the needs and demands of the people". "The people" may not also be the same people depending on who communicates and the same goes for "the elite". Stanley (2008, as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 28) further explains that populist parties are constructed on the depreciation of the political elite, that is seen as an "oligarchy" and a different "caste" of society, and at the same time the affirmation to embody the "ordinary people".

Discourse-theoretical definition of populism

For the purpose of this thesis, the focus will be on populism as a political logic, therefore using the discourse-theoretical definition previously mentioned: this idea of calling the citizens members of "the people" and making political claims for them while opposing them to "the elite" who abuses their power and privileges (De Cleen, 2019, p. 19-20). This logic can be used across the political spectrum as populism is not characterized by a particular ideology (De Cleen, 2019, p. 19).

Legitimacy

A very common problem faced by populism is legitimacy. Populist politicians or parties must gain legitimacy in order to be able to come to power. As they supposedly represent the will of the people, they get their legitimacy from the people themselves and in their will to represent these people's voices (Taguieff, 1997 as cited in Biard et al. 2021 p. 141). Still according to the same source, populists reinforce their legitimacy by attacking their political rivals and the "elites" that are corrupted and selfish. This dual vision of society is the key to populism.

Critics

Critics against populism are numerous, one of them is that populism is a form of opportunism in politics; in other words, oversimplifying solutions to very complex societal problems (De Cleen, 2019, p. 22). Other commonly heard complaints are the "emotional (as opposed to rational), simplistic (as opposed to complex), antagonistic (as opposed to reasonable and consensual) and anti-intellectual message and style that is aimed at the underbelly of the people (rather than their brains)" (Mudde, 2004, p. 542 and Targuieff, 1998, p.7 as cited in De Cleen, 2019, p. 22).

Generally, politicians rarely acknowledge themselves to be "populist" because of the heavy negative connotation surrounding the word. In fact, qualifying someone as a "populist" in politics is typically an attack, an open critique to that person (Debras, 2018, p. 76).

Left or right?

Typically, if economic concerns prevail in a society, it tends to develop left-wing populism while if ethnic issues dominate, the society will turn towards right-wing populism (Podobnik et al., 2019, p. 460). From the example of France, it can be concluded that there is a division among what society considers as the biggest threat for the country and that is shown through the popularization of both right and left-wing populism.

As previously stated, Europe has seen the rise of both right-wing – such as the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) or the Dutch *Partij Voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) – and left-wing populism – such as *Unidas Podemos* (UP) in Spain or *SYRIZA* (ΣΥΡΙΖΑ) in Greece (Ivaldi,

2019, p. 27). These parties have managed to get momentum, as well as voters and to some extend power, in their respective countries. In the previously listed countries, either right or left-wing populism dominates the scene. In the case of France, they somehow must share the spotlight. This is not a recent trend: historically, France has had right and left-wing populism variants since the Second World War (Ivaldi, 2019, p. 28).

Mudde (2004, as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 28) explains that since populism is not attached to a fixed political side, party, or context, it is rather based on what he characterizes as a "thin-centered ideology". Therefore, populism must associate itself with consequential and firm-standing set of ideas to give a meaning to itself (Mudde, 2004, as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 28). Rooduijn and Akkerman (2017, as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 28) found that in the Western European context, populism was found amongst radical left and radical right. Radical right associates itself with nativism and authoritarianism and is usually culturally exclusionist while radical left presents itself with a typically universalistic profile and social inclusivity as an opposition to the economic elite (Mudde, 2007; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013; Gomez-Reino and Llamazares 2016, as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 28).

These tendencies coincide with the findings of studies conducted on the ideological profile of voters. Research has demonstrated that right-wing populist voters have displayed a pronounced tendency of cultural exclusionism, opposition to immigration and to a multicultural society while left-wing populist voters have shown to give a greater importance to economic equality and wealth redistribution (Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2018 as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 28). In other words, right-wing populism is typically characterized as "exclusionary": excluding members of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities, while left-wing populism falls under "inclusionary": it requires that rights and resources extend to majority and minorities (Golder, 2016; Otjes, Ivaldi, Jupskås & Mazzoleni, 2018; Rooduij,, De Lange & Van Der Brug, 2014, as cited in Vasilopoulos & Jost, 2020, p. 2).

Overall, studies found that people voting for populist parties (whether right or left wing) where predicted by low socio-economic status, deep distrust, severe protestive behaviors and high levels of Euroscepticism (Bakker, Rooduij & Schumacher, 2016; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Halikiopoulou, Nanou & Vasilopoulou, 2012; Schumacher & Rooduijn, 2013; Spruyt, Keppens & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016 as cited in Vasilopoulos & Jost, 2020, p. 1). On top of that, research underlines that appeal towards populism is caused by economic hardships, low levels

of education, perceptions of "external threat" but also that certain people are extremely attracted towards populism based on their personalities and personal motives, and that independently of demographics (Vasilopoulos & Jost, 2020, p. 8). Other researchers disagree with that claim and believe that instead, populist parties lack a strong electoral base: the fact that most populist parties are classified as "radical" makes it difficult to understand whether populism, radicalism, or even possibly a combination of the two, is what truly attracts people (Rooduijn, 2018; Van Elsas, 2017, Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2015, as cited in Vasilopoulos & Jost, 2020, p. 1-2).

Why exactly is populism, and populist parties, as mainstream as they are may remain disputed, what is not is their prevalence in France. As shown by the last decade's election results and by the literature, the two parties dominating the populist scene in the French Republic are: *La France Insoumise* and the *Rassemblement National*, which are respectively the parties at the head of which there is Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen (Ivaldi, 2019, p.29).

I chose to study France for multiple reasons. One of them, as mentioned above is that France has seen a rise of both right and left-wing populism. These typically arise because of different reasons, as a reaction to certain events or crisis (Podobnik et al., 2019, p. 460). It is therefore interesting to see what factors led France to develop both. Other countries in Europe have developed an even stronger link to populism, such as Hungary, Bulgaria, or Poland, but these have either a huge tendency towards left or right-wing populism, but not towards both unlike France which furthermore holds the fourth position behind these three in statistics concerning the European Union countries that are most likely to support populist parties (Boros et al., 2016, p.11). The fact that it developed two major different strands of populism shows that the French society is clearly divided on what they perceive as a threat. France is therefore quite a unique case to study. Furthermore, France is a country with global influence. What happens in France could have repercussions that would be felt worldwide perhaps by changing its traditional allies and its membership to organizations such as the European Union, or NATO.

Populism: the case of Le Pen and Mélenchon

The selection of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon was based on multiple criteria. Firstly, they are a perfect example for a right and left-wing populist representation in France. On top of that, their parties are currently dominating the populist scene of France as shown by the literature (Ivaldi, 2019, p. 29) and by the latest Presidential election results where they

respectively came in second and third at the first round (Roger & Darame, 2022). They both are recognized as, and prized themselves to be, populist leaders (Debras, 2018, p. 75). Le Pen and Mélenchon have been called populist on numerous occasions by academics or journalists and they own it: they ended of claiming themselves that they are indeed "populists" (Debras, 2018, p. 77). As mentioned with the critics of populism, this is indeed very rare. These are two very interesting figures of that rise of populism in France. Le Pen's ideas and discourses fall under right-wing populism, Mélenchon under left-wing populism (Debras, 2018, p. 77; Gerstlé & Nai, 2019, p.429). While both represent two different types of populism, they do share common positions on certain topics: the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and globalization (Ivaldi et al. 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Perrineau 2017 as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 32-35). In addition, these two have been in politics for decades and have changed, modernized, and adapted their style of communications, tried to reach out to other audiences, sometimes even their views on specific issues evolved throughout the years. These two personas are the personal embodiment and leaders of their parties and that is another reason why I chose them.

There is another major populist player in France that has not been mentioned so far: Eric Zemmour. He was not chosen for this work as he is much newer on the political scene and as shown by the election results, far less popular.

Gerstlé and Nai (2019, p.429) studied "the negativity, emotionality and populist rhetoric in election campaigns worldwide, and their effects on media attention and electoral success" and found multiple relevant pieces of information about the studied politicians here. The data collected by both researchers did confirm the populist profile of Mélenchon, with a pronounced tendency to use of informal language and anti-elitism (p. 429). Furthermore, the researchers concluded that Jean-Luc Mélenchon mostly criticized the other politicians on leftist-owned subjects such as education, health care, unemployment, and protection of the environment. The study also confirmed the populist profile of Le Pen but attributed a different style to hers: the loathing of a part of the population (p. 418). On top of that, the researchers found out that she chose to attack her rivals on topics such as: immigration, asylum, crime and security, and religion/morality (p.432). In line with the previous finding, the study also revealed that she used the subjects of terrorism, immigration, and religious extremism to appeal fear and anxiety among her electorate (p. 429).

From these findings, it can be concluded that Mélenchon does coincide with the "inclusionary" left-wing populist type defined previously while Le Pen's populism can be characterized as "exclusionary". This also concords with studies conducted on the psychological aspects of populist voters. For the 2017 French election, Vasilopoulos & Jost (2020, p. 7-8) found that Mélenchon supporters' personalities were defined by their high levels of openness to new experiences and agreeableness and low in conscientiousness; Le Pen's supporter's personalities exhibited the total opposite. They also concluded that the support for both politicians was caused by their representation of right and left-wing options rather than their representation of populism ideals (p. 9).

To summarize very briefly what was previously stated: populism is characterized by a division between the people and the elites, and the population comprised inside these two terms may vary. For Mélenchon, he identifies the "Europe of banks and the traditional political class" as the targets of his program (Damiani, 2020, p. 2) – in other words, as the elite. He sensed how divided the French society was and drawing on that, he projected "a sense of collective belonging" that did not previously exist in the country's left-wing politics before (Damiani, 2020, p. 2). This explains how his party and him managed to rise in popularity, building a sort of community around him of workers as well as ordinary citizens, still according to Damiani (2020, p. 2). The "people" that Mélenchon claims to be the defender of are unified not through a language, a skin color or a particular culture but rather by a strong belief in his political program and his vision for the French nation, through their love for the country and for honest work (Debras, 2018, p. 82).

Le Pen has a different understanding of "the people": she claims to be representing the long-lost voice of the French nationals, the workers such as craftsmen or employees, but also the retired and the unemployed, who share a strong will to work for, love and respect France, French and its traditions (Debras, 2018, p.78-9). Unlike Mélenchon, Le Pen rejects any sort of arrangement for religious or cultural practices by the State, the public services, or the private sectors as she considers those to weaken the nation (Debras, 2018, p. 79). Le Pen denounces the elites – whether political, economic, national, or European – for stealing and lying to the people (Debras, 2018, p. 79).

Chapter 2: Analytical Framework and Methodology

Following the review of the existing literature on populism, the analytical framework used for this dissertation will be thoroughly defined and explained, it will be containing relevant discourse analysis theories, with the congruous segments of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's work as well as Van Dijk's in particular. As populism and discourse analysis are two crucial elements of this thesis, it is important to try to understand them, as complex as both can be.

Discourse

Multiple understandings of the word "discourse" exist but it is most commonly understood as a general idea that language is structured according to different arrangements that people's articulations create when they take part in different domains of social life; well known examples are the "medical discourse" or the "political discourse" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 1). In other words, a discourse is a specific manner of discussing and understanding the world, or a part of it. As Horwarth and Stravrakakis write (2000, as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 6): "Put simply, the concept of discourse is used to name and view the strategies of signification or meaning-making engaged by sets of agents as they battle to fix the presence of a particular identity of an object, subject or practice". Therefore, discourse is a process of meaning-making that combines linguistic and non-linguistic such as ideas, practices and images but also speeches and writings (Howarth, 2000 as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 7). It is important to note that these definitions of discourse go beyond the classical understanding of discourse limited to speeches or oral allocutions. Based on this, it can be concluded that discourse analysis is hence based on a social constructivist approach (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 2-3).

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a field that is complex, sometimes flawed, but also is very diversified and rich (Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 2). Discourse analysis can be used in a variety of applications and various strands exist, but in this case, the focus will be on the Discourse Theory (DT) of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Van Dijk. The practical analysis will be mixing elements from both approaches, it is therefore essential to understand the basics of each. Such multi-perspectival approach is not only possible in the

discursive field but is also generally positively valued as it provides a deeper understanding (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 4).

While DT and CDA are two different approaches to discourse analysis, they do share common premises:

- The knowledge of the world is not an objective truth nor a reflection of the reality "out there". Reality is only possible to understand through categories, so knowledge is the product of that categorization, or in discursive analytical terms: product of discourse (Burr, 1995, p.3; Gergen, 1985, P. 266-7 as cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 5);

- The understanding of history and culture is not universal and may evolve or change with time. Discourse, as a form of social action, plays a role in that maintenance of certain social patterns (Burr, 1995, p. 3, as cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 5);

- The understanding of the world is created and maintained by social processes that, in turn, produce knowledge. Knowledge then constructs common truths or what is understood as true or false (Burr, 1995, p.4; Gergen, 1985, p. 268, as cited in in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 5);

- The created vision of the world defines which actions are natural and which are unthinkable. The different worldview, or the different social understandings, lead to different social actions which implies that knowledge and truth have social consequences (Burr, 1995, p. 5; Gergen, 1985, p. 268-9, as cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 6).

Considering that the definition of discourse is now set and that the field of discourse analysis is introduced, the following part of this work will be concerned with how Mouffe and Laclau have developed their own conception and theory of how reality is constructed through discourses.

Laclau and Mouffe

Laclau and Mouffe constructed their theory by mixing and changing certain aspects of Marxism and structuralism to create a single post-structuralist theory in which the entirety of the social fields are processes of creating meaning (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 25). Their discourse theory supports that reality (beliefs, identities, norms or objects) is not "real" or fixed but is the outcome of discourses, which are meaning making (MacKillop, 2018, p. 189). The basis of their theory is that discourses build the social world in meaning but that meaning is never fixed,

instead it is constantly transformed by contacts with other discourses where a constant struggle exist to dominate, achieve hegemony over, the meaning of a particular perspective (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 6-7). Therefore, one of the keywords of DT is discursive struggle (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 6), which is the concept explained in the previous sentence.

Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory (DT) gives the opportunity to analyze the language but also the meaning of organizational phenomena (Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 2). As stated by Bridgman and Willmott (2006, p. 114), the main asset of this specific discourse theory that "assumes and affirms the primacy of the political" is its sensitiveness to conflict and struggle over meaning and identity (as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 2), which are crucial elements in the populist discourses.

Words as signifiers

According to DT, words are signifiers. This means that there are used in a particular time and space to hold a certain meaning; but that meaning that words carry is not universal, it is specific to that time and space (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987, as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 7). Discourses are the transporters that allow these different meanings to be articulated (Howarth and Stravrakakis, 2000 as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 7). The precise moment where this meaning is given in a discourse is called a "nodal point" (see figure 1) (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002 as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 7). These nodal points play as "privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain" as Lauclau and Mouffe write (1985, p. 112 as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 7). This signifying chain, or chain of equivalence, represents a grouping of nodal points that allows the empty signifier to have the intended meaning (Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 9). This process takes place due to the "surplus of meaning" that exist in social practice (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 111 as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 9).
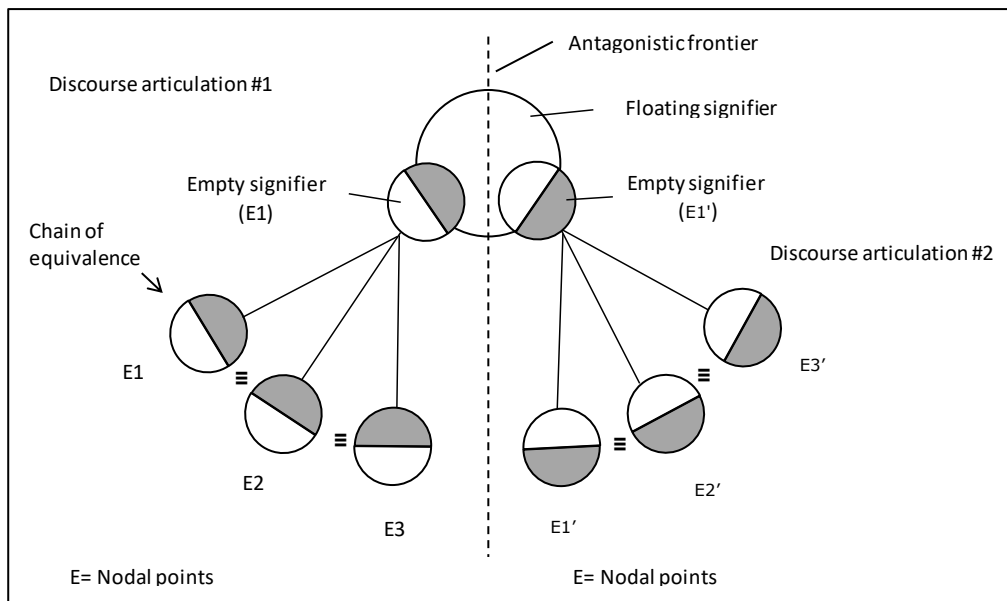
Figure 1: Antagonistic Discourse Articulation

(Source: Boon and Walton, 2014, p.8)

What is meant by antagonistic frontier in Figure 1 is the line between competing discourses articulations, in other words: a discursive barrier "dividing "us" from "them"" (Thomassen, 2005, p. 293 as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 8). That barrier is typically used in populist discourses reviewed in the previous part of this work.

Figure 1 serves as the illustration of conflict at the floating signifier level. A floating signifier is a word or a term that creates controversy around its meaning and that therefore ends up having no clearly defined meaning (Norval, 2000, p. 331, as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 9). Accordingly, a floating signifier can have different meanings, depending on the particular time, place and context in which it is used.

The distinction between empty signifier and floating signifier is simple: empty signifiers are words that are given meaning through discourses while floating signifiers are words that generally have disputed meanings (MacKillop, 2018, p. 187). Words can be both, these two categories are not mutually excludable. Credible empty signifiers are typically in accordance with history and tradition of "the basic principles informing the organization of a group" (Laclau, 1990, p. 66 as cited in MacKillop, 2018, p. 188). Yet, as noted by MacKillop (2018, p. 188), the process through which empty signifiers turn into floating signifiers remains quite

unknown. Criticisms about the use of empty signifier point out that they can lead to a loss of credibility (MacKillop, 2018, p.187).

To exemplify, a relevant floating signifier could be the term "democracy". Surely, Le Pen and Mélenchon both have their personal understandings of democracy and when using that word in their respective discourses, the meaning changes. Mouffe herself also admitted that the term "democracy" is "ambiguous, open to debate and struggle" and works great as a floating signifier (Worsham and Olson, 1999, p. 178).

In an interview Mouffe gave, she also provided the example of the "common good" as a floating signifier (Worsham and Olson, 1999, p. 177). She further says in that same interview that "politics must always think in terms of common good, but we will always define the common good in different ways" and later on adds that it is "something we will always be trying to define". The results of the discourse analysis will later on reveal more precisely what are the floating signifiers used by Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Mouffe worked on various theories and ideas throughout her carrier and another relevant element that she pointed out is that political passions – such as outrage, anger, empathy, sympathy – are the foundations to build a collective form of identification (Worsham and Olson, 1999, p. 166). Such political passions are also exploited by populists in their discourses, including Le Pen and Mélenchon. This allows them to create a bond with their audience based on sharp emotional appeals.

Van Dijk and Critical Discourse Analysis

After the clarification, or perhaps complexification, of the word "discourse", this next part will be concerned with Critical Discourse Analysis (also known as CDA) with Teun A. van Dijk. Other important figures exist in CDA, such as Fairclough, but to remain clear and concise, this dissertation will only focus on Van Dijk's work.

The understanding of the basis of critical discourse analysis is important for this work as the discourses analysis of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon will use the tools, guidance and requirements provided by critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis is about studying, understanding, highlighting and criticizing the relationship between discourse and power (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 363). Following CDA guidelines, discourses must be explored as an approach to ideologies, intentions or strategies (Titscher, 2000; Argermüller, 2007, as cited in Debras, 2022, p. 3). In his chapter about critical discourse analysis in "The Handbook of Discourse Analysis", van Dijk (2018, p. 352-363) introduces the basic workings of CDA, including its importance, its flaws, its principles. This following section will be entirely referring to his chapter in that book.

Critical discourse analysis integrates various approaches, largely due to the fact it is multidisciplinary (p. 363). Van Dijk defines it as "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (2001, p. 352). He further specifies that it is not a "specific direction of research" (2001, p. 353) but rather a "mode" or "perspective" (2001, p. 352).

The author cites the major fields in which CDA is used: media discourses, political discourses and lastly discourses enacting and reproducing gender inequality, ethnocentrism, antisemitism, nationalism and racism (2001, p. 358-362). For the purpose of this work, the focus will be around political discourses.

A major contribution of van Dijk (2001, p. 354-355) to CDA is the study of power and influence. He recognized that a few groups have more power and influence over the rest of society based on their "privileged access to scare social resources" such as wealth, status, fame, knowledge, information but more interestingly, to their access to various forms of public discourse and communication. With that power and influence also comes the ability to control, partially, the rest of the population's actions, knowledge, and opinion (p. 355). These advantaged members have a relatively easy access to the different types of public discourses thanks to their powerful status among the rest of society (p. 356). Such members are professors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, and politicians.

The author further highlights that this control over discourses is a form of power that has the property of "mind control" and gives a few examples of how dominance and power are involved (p. 357):

- Discourses from figures of authority (scholars, experts, professionals, news outlets) have a lesser chance of creating a rejection of their beliefs, knowledge and opinions (unless they are not in line with people's own beliefs and past experiences);
- The recipients of the discourses may not always be recipients by choice (typical examples are found in education or job situations);
- There are no systematic alternative discourses available to challenge the discourses or information presented.

Another contributing factor to "mind control" is how persuasive the argumentation is, whether it is carrying "hidden" social opinions or being more upfront about them – the author additionally argues that communicating beliefs in an implicit manner is a typical feature of manipulation (p.358).

Van Dijk then defines several requirements for an effective critical discourse analysis (p. 353):

- It has to offer something more than other classical research methods;
- Its primary focus has to be on social problems and political issues instead of paradigms and fashions;
- It has to be multidisciplinary in order to fully comprehend the scope of social problems;
- It has to explain discourse structure rather than simply describing them;
- It has to focus on how the structures of discourses "enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society".

These requirements will serve as guidelines throughout the practical discourse analysis of this work.

All in all, critical discourse analysis gives the opportunity to see how discourses play a role in mass dominance, power structures and the perpetuation of social inequalities (Van Dijk, 2018, p. 358). This work will try to seek an answer to the hypotheses posed earlier as well as apply critical discourse analysis onto the campaign meetings of Le Pen and Mélenchon and see what words used by both would fit into the empty signifier definition seen previously.

With the defined theoretical framework set out with the introduction to DT and CDA theories, the next part will described how they will be applied concretely in the rest of this work.

Methodology

The methodology used during this part of the work will be a qualitative analysis. While some quantitative data may scarcely appear in the analysis, its goal is only to further illustrate the qualitative data. French populism has already been frequently researched using quantitative data and it is not the objective of this work. In this case, using a qualitative analysis allows a much finer analysis of the subjects and thematic used in the discourses that a regular quantitative analysis would miss. On top of that, a quantitative analysis would be more interesting if using a large sample of discourses, which is not the case here. While qualitative has many advantages, it also presents down sides. One of them is the impossibility of the data to be tested, verified and checked like quantitative data. Therefore, data could be negatively affected by that and seemingly less reliable and more open argumentation and critics.

For this master's dissertation, it would be impossible to go through every single discourse made by Le Pen and Mélenchon. As seen previously, a discourse can take multiple forms: it is a process of meaning-making that combines linguistic and non-linguistic such as ideas, practices, and images but also speeches and writings (Howarth, 2000 as cited in Boon and Walton, 2014, p. 7). For the limits of this work, I will only take into consideration the speeches of both candidates held at campaign meetings. Furthermore, this will allow to identify the empty and floating signifiers while comparing their discourses. Other speeches made by the candidates in the chosen period (such as to the national assembly) do not directly address their electorate and are therefore irrelevant for the purposes of this work as ultimately the goal is to see which subjects, they wished to highlight and under what angle. Press releases will not be considered either, as they are very short and typically focused on one particular subject, which would make it impossible to make a real thematic analysis. Joint declarations, such as the one submitted by Le Pen at the Madrid Summit, will also not be studied as they are the results of the opinion or position of multiple people, but the focus of this work is solely on Le Pen and Mélenchon. Conferences will not be considered either as they indirectly address their electorates but directly are aimed at the press.

I will therefore limit myself to the official speeches made at meetings by each as part of their respective candidate's Presidential campaign of 2022, from the moment they officially declared their candidacy up to the first round of the election. This will be the specific time frame for the discourse analysis. Discourses made as part of the second round of the election will not be considered to remain fair towards both candidates, as only Marine Le Pen made it to the second round. Additionally, the time period between the first and second round is relatively short, their impact would be negligible for this analysis.

As to why choosing the 2022 election specifically, similar discourse analyses on the previous elections have been already overly done, therefore choosing the latest, and very recent, election had more relevance. Furthermore, the popularity of both candidates has never been that high and it is interesting to see if this manifest in their discourses.

These discourses will be taken directly from each candidate's official campaign website or official their YouTube channel as these are reliable and trustworthy sources. As the 2022 election is a relatively recent event, no transcription exists for the vast majority of these speeches (Only three of Le Pen's discourses held at meetings have an official transcription). Before getting into the content of these, I will therefore write them in their entirety myself. Overall, my analysis will be based on all of both candidates' meeting discourse, which represents: 17 discourses for Mélenchon (meeting "*multi-hologramme*", "*sur l'eau*", "*en réalité augmentée*" as well as those held in Aubin, Bordeaux, Guadeloupe, Marseille, Martinique, Montpellier, Nantes, Paris, Reims, Réunion, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Tours and Valence) and 11 for Le Pen (meetings held in Aigues-Mortes, Bouchain, Fréjus, Marseille, Mayotte, Perpignan, Reims, Saint-Martin-Laucassade, Stiring-Wendel, Vallauris and Vienne).

Throughout my work and my analysis, I will try to remain as objective as possible. Common criticism against critical discourse analysis, which is the method that I will be using, is how the data can be "cherry-picked" by researchers to match their expectations and points of view (Koller & Mautner, 2004, p. 225; Orpin, 2005, p. 38; Partington, 2004, p. 13 as cited in Baker, 2012, p. 247). To make sure this will not be the case during this dissertation, I will use an induction method and guided by my findings, I will look more deeply into these subjects. It must also be considered that being a 100% objective in qualitative research is impossible, but I will, very consciously of the possible biases I could have relating to own personal political

preferences, do my very best to remain impartial. While I may not claim to remedy to the human brain created biases, I can be aware of them and be careful.

Once this is done, I will compare the list for both and see which both of them share. These common preferred subjects will then be analyzed individually to see how each politician uses these terms, in what context and for what purpose. Then, I will investigate whether their opinions on these key topics, called floating signifiers as seen earlier, converge (partially, totally or not at all), using the guidance provided by critical discourse analysis. In other words, I will look into the meaning-making process around these words. Unfortunately, the high specificity of the data chosen might cause a loss in possible generalization of these findings. I will also try to identify the key populist elements in their discourses, namely the people and the elite or the need for legitimacy.

I will also try to see how, and if, they address each other in their public speeches. I will briefly analyze how many times they mention the other candidate, what terms are used to qualify that person, see whether they talk positively or negatively about each other and if they do, on what basis.

The structure of the analytical part of this work will be as follows: the thematic analysis in each discourse selected and then a comparison of these. The structuring of meeting-by-meeting thematic analysis allows to remain more unbiased towards what the main themes mobilized in their discourses and to get a more precise picture before a general one. This choice of practice further enables to identify the floating and empty signifiers in their speeches according to DT. Besides, CDA also allows to see how power and influence reflect in their discourses. The next part of the analysis will be then centered on the ideological and rhetorical aspects.

Chapter 3: Quick History and Facts about Le Pen and Mélenchon

This short chapter will have for mission to introduce quickly Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon with relevant numbers about the 2022 election, their key publics as well as their history in politics to be able to gain full understanding of the next part of this work.

2022 French election in numbers

In 2017, Le Pen and Mélenchon had already participated to the presidential race in France and respectively obtained 21,3% and 19,58% of the votes in the first round of elections (Duchemin, 2017). In comparison, Emmanuel Macron, the winner of that election and France's 8th President of the 5th French Republic, won with 24,1% of the votes in the first round. There was no huge gaps between the three politicians but only Macron and Le Pen accessed the second round of elections. She lost despite receiving over 10,6 million votes in that second round (Pommiers et al., 2017). These numbers do show how that despite Mélenchon and Le Pen's defeat, both were serious and solid candidates and did come somehow close to reaching the French Presidency that year.

The situation was somewhat similar in 2022. According to the official website of the French Minister of the Interior, the first round of election confirmed again the selection of Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, with Macron winning in the second round with over 58% of the votes. It must be noted nevertheless that this was following the call of the majority of the candidate that did not make it to the second round to rally over Macron to block Le Pen from becoming President (Le Monde with AFP, 2022).

The French Minister of the Interior declares that during the first round of the elections Macron came first with almost 28% of the votes, followed by Le Pen with 23,15%. Mélenchon came third and was very close with 21,95%. This represents a difference of 421 308 votes between the two latter mentioned names. The situation that had happened in 2017 reproduced itself in 2022 and once again, Le Pen and Mélenchon came close to reaching the French presidency. With the latest election, Le Pen still progressed compared to 2017: she got 33,6% of the votes

in the second round in 2017 but got 41,5% in 2022. She proudly claimed those numbers as a "spectacular victory" ("*une victoire éclatante*") and progress for her party (Boyer, 2022).

Jean-Luc Mélenchon

Quick background

Jean-Luc Mélenchon was born in Tangier, in Morocco, in 1951 while the country was still a French colony (Vigier, 2017, p.44). At the age of 25, he joined the Socialist Party (PS) of François Mitterrand (Damiani, 2017, p.1), who will then become the French President from 1981 to 1995.

Before creating *La France Insoumise*, Mélenchon left the PS in 2008 to create *Le Parti de Gauche* ("Left Party") along with Marc Dolez, another former PS member. He stepped down from the leadership in 2014 after his election to the European Parliament (Vigier, 2017, p.46).

2022 marked Jean-Luc Mélenchon's third attempt to the Presidential position and his second attempt as the leader of his own party (Mestre, 2020).

La France Insoumise

In 2016, Jean-Luc Mélenchon decided to create his own party: *La France Insoumise* ("France Unbowed") at the same time as he announced his candidature to the presidential election of 2017 (Vigier, 2017, p.42, 47). Mélenchon and his newly founded party were considered as total outsiders yet, as mentioned previously, the candidate managed to unexpectedly get around 20% of the votes at the first presidential election round, far more than the Socialist Party and its leader Benoit Hamon had managed to get (Vigier, 2017, p.42). The PS was in a tough position after Hollande's Presidency, from 2012 to 2017. This turned out to be a great window of opportunity for Mélenchon and he seized it. It is important to note that the 2017 elections were taking place in a context where the French people were screaming for change at the end of Hollande's socialist presidency disaster, which even led to him not competing for re-election, a historic move (KFCIS, 2017, p.4). These events created massive divisions among the left side of French politics. There was an attempt to create a socialist-led coalition, but two dissidents decided otherwise: Emmanuel Macron and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (KFCIS, 2017, p. 4).

Mélenchon's party defines itself as a humanist movement with a universalist strategy towards "emancipation", understood as the republican vision of freedom, equality and fraternity (Le Gallo, 2020, p. 106-8).

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's 2022 campaign

Already while campaigning for the 2017 election, Mélenchon managed to get huge crowds out to rally for him, especially young people (Vigier, 2017, p. 42). He managed to do so more than any other candidate. Perhaps what made Mélenchon so popular was his ability to use new technologies at its advantage. On the eve of the first round of election in 2017, the candidate held a meeting in Dijon. In the meantime, his speech was retransmitted live by a hologram in 6 other cities (Vigier, 2017, p. 43). In 2022, he used the available technology to his advantage again. A few days before the first round of elections, he held what he calls "*multi-meeting hologramme*", which is a meeting in a city (in this case Lille) where his image is reproduced by a hologram in 11 other cities simultaneously. This technique was a first historically according to his website melechon2022.fr. This innovative way to talk to his electorate also goes further: Mélenchon also proposes content that is typically not done by politicians such as vlogs (video blogs) on YouTube. Vlogs are typically a format done by YouTubers or influencers.

Figure 2: Mélenchon's Multi-Meeting Hologramme Promotional Poster

(Source : mélenchon2022.fr)

From the visual of his campaign, as seen by figure 2, it can be observed that the candidate used very flashy colors and visual effects. Mélenchon overall uses social media regularly and has a huge following on the different platforms that he uses: TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, Twitch and LinkedIn (Favikon, 2022). In April 2022, he had over 2 million followers on the social media platform TikTok for instance, where he frequently publishes content. These are just a few examples of how Mélenchon uses atypical and newer means of communication to connect with his electorate. Taking all of that into consideration, French media even awarded him the title of "the uncontested king of social media" (Favikon, 2022).

While looking at the numbers of the 2022 elections, one thing is crystal-clear: younger voters are voting Mélenchon primarily as seen on figure 3 – the red represents Mélenchon, the purple is for Macron and the dark blue stands for Le Pen's voters amongst the different age groups. The 18-24 and 25-34 age groups voted for the most part for Mélenchon. It must also be noted that France has a history of young voters' high level of abstention and despite Mélenchon's effort to rally these voters, 40% of the 18-35 age group did not vote in the first round of presidential election in 2022 (Muxel, 2022). This abstention level is higher than in the 2017 presidential elections and is particularly high for a presidential election; typically municipal, departmental, regional, or European elections do have high level of abstentions, but the election of a new president traditionally gets more voters to the urns (Muxel, 2022).

Figure 3 legend: Electeurs de Jean-Luc Mélenchon • Electeurs d'Emmanuel Macron • Electeurs de Marine Le Pen

18-24 ans: Mélenchon 31%, Macron 20%, Le Pen 26%
25-34 ans: Mélenchon 34%, Macron 23%, Le Pen 25%
35-49 ans: Mélenchon 22%, Macron 24%, Le Pen 28%
50-59 ans: Mélenchon 22%, Macron 24%, Le Pen 30%
60-69 ans: Mélenchon 17%, Macron 30%, Le Pen 22%
70 ans et plus: Mélenchon 9%, Macron 41%, Le Pen 13%
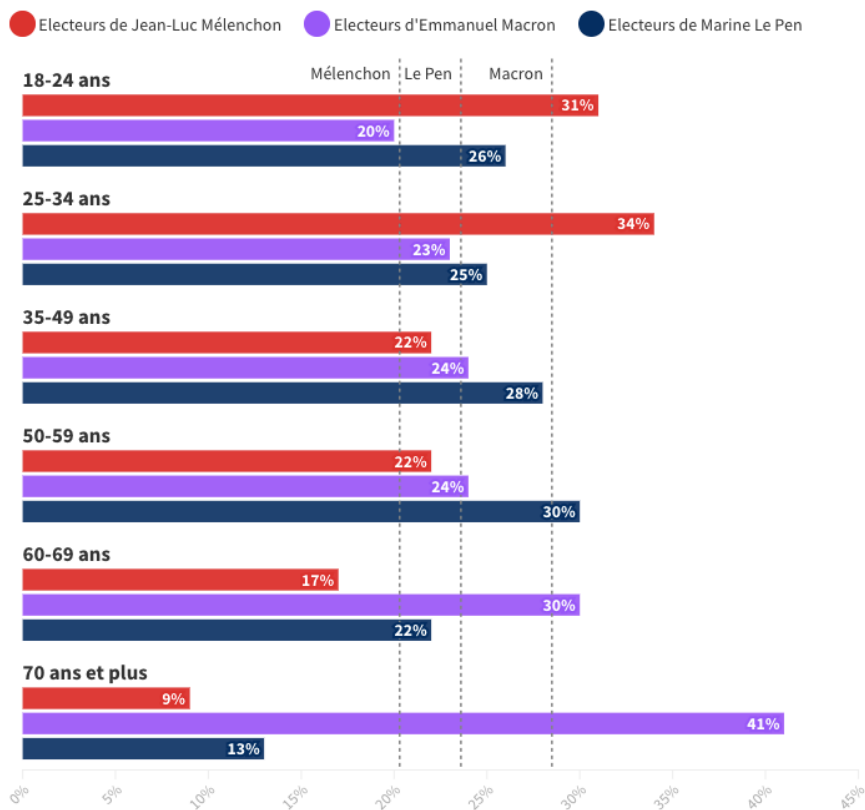
(Source: Ipsos - Sopra Steria for France Télévisions, Radio France, France24/RFI/MCD

Figure 3: Mélenchon, Le Pen and Macron's voters sorted by age groups for the first round of the 2022 presidential election

Public Sénat/LCP Assemblée Nationale and Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui in France)

Marine Le Pen

Quick background

Marine Le Pen was born in 1968 in Hauts-de-Seine in France, studied Law at university and became a lawyer in 1992 (Figaro Etudiant, 2017). With her father being a politician, she was always surrounded by members of what would later become her own party (Figaro Etudiant, 2017) and joined herself officially in 1986 (CNews).

In the context of the 2017 election, everyone was already assured that Marine Le Pen and her party were going towards an unprecedented success (KFCIS, 2017, p. 4) and that assumption turned out to be true: she did make it into the second round of the election.

The presidential election of 2022 marked Le Pen's third candidature for the position (Vendrely, 2021). Her first candidature was in 2012, where she did not manage to get enough vote to go to the second round. She nevertheless received 17,9% of the votes that year and came third (Vendrely, 2021). Just like Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Marine Le Pen became increasingly popular throughout the years, managing to get an increasing number of votes with each candidature.

Le Rassemblement National

Unlike Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Marine Le Pen did not create her own party but rather inherited it from her father. Her party was created in 1972 and established itself as major player in French politics since the mid-1980s (Ivaldi, 2019, p. 29). She did, nevertheless, go through some sort of rebranding throughout the years; concrete example of that is how she updated her party's name the *Rassemblement National* ("the national gathering"), previously called the *Front National* ("the national front") after losing the 2017 presidential elections, this was seen as a way to further differentiate herself from her father's ideas – she inherited the party from him in 2011 and excluded him in 2015 (Combis, 2018). Since becoming the *Rassemblement National* president, she has been on a mission to clearly separate herself from the passed party image and appeal to a larger electorate, notably women (Mayer, 2013, p. 161).

While the party had already known some success under her father's presidency, the current popularity of the *Rassemblement National* is unprecedented (Guerrier & Moncla, 2016).

Marine Le Pen's 2022 campaign

Similarly to Mélenchon, Le Pen also tried to modernize her campaign for the 2022 elections. She also joined the social network TikTok for example and regularly posts updates or pictures on Instagram. Nevertheless, she does come across with a more "classic", "traditional" politician type. This can be illustrated by her official campaigning poster (see figure 4). As seen on the graph on figure 3, she did get around 20% of 18-24 and 25-34 years' votes but she got her largest number of votes from the 35-49 and 50-59 age groups.

Her 2022 campaign also marked a few changes in Le Pen's ideas such as her proposal to remain in the Union (that she wanted previously to withdraw from) and decrease the French contribution as well as renegotiate the Union treaties for topics such as stricter border control

for France (Perru, 2022). Voters unhappy with EU policies are plentiful but voters willing to leave the EU were found in vast majority among Le Pen supporters only (Mayer, 2013, p. 167). She further changed position on double nationality ownership, wishes to forbit the wearing of the Islamic veil (she previously had expressed wishes to ban the veil and the Jewish kippah), changed position on the development of renewable energies and now would prefer to dismantle wind turbines in the country (Forêt, 2022).

Figure 4: Le Pen's Official Poster for her 2022 Campaign

(Source: mlafrance.fr)

As mentioned previously, Le Pen managed to go to the second round of election in 2022, where she eventually lost to Emmanuel Macron. That second round of election was tainted by accusations made about the *Rassemblement National* head: use of false numbers concerning immigration on her second-round promotional pamphlet (Le Baron, 2022) and embezzlement for misuse of European funds for personal or party expenses (De Houck, 2022). She also faced massive opposition from other parties who called their voters to not vote for her in that second round (Le Monde with AFP, 2022).

Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon: similitudes and differences

Mélenchon and Le Pen have a history of being quite confrontational with each other. In fact, Le Pen even tried to sue Mélenchon because he had called her "a fascist", a legal procedure that she lost (Vigier, 2017, p. 48). As mentioned previously, Le Pen and Mélenchon have been in the field of politics for decades. Throughout the years, it is quite easy to find occasions where they talk negatively about one another. A quick search into French televisions archives, the INA (*Institut National de l'Audivisuel* - the French National Institute for the Audiovisual) mentioning both names together will show, throughout the years, over 100 occurrences where they talk about each other and on some occasions even directly to each other, almost exclusively in negative terms.

Nevertheless, the two politicians and their parties do have some similar ideas on certain topics. Both are Eurosceptic to different degrees and claim to be for different reasons, Mélenchon for the neoliberal turn of the Union, who twisted out of its original purpose and its domination by big trusts while Le Pen opposes it as she associates it with the large income of illegal migrants and furthermore represents a threat to French national identity (Mayer, 2013, p. 167). Besides, the two politicians also profess to have their national interests at heart but again, these interests differ and additionally, both rely on anti-political-establishment mobilization by rallying voters that were unhappy with the traditional mainstream politics (Ivaldi et al. 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Perrineau 2017 as cited in Ivaldi, 2019, p. 32-35). On top of that, both have quite negative views on migration, Mélenchon stated previously that he did not agree with the right for migrants to settle in France for example (Vigier, 2017, p.48) and Le Pen promised a revolution for immigration if she was elected with restricted measures going from the end of family reunification to harsher access to the French nationality (Kristanadjaja, 2022). Lastly, their views on Islam coincide to some extent, on the wear of the veil for example. During an official visit to Lebanon, Le Pen refused to wear the Islamic veil – which was accused of being a publicity stunt to once again bring back the debate about Islam on the front line of French politics – and Mélenchon publicly supported her refusal to conform to the guidelines (Vigier, 2017, p. 48).

All in all, it is key to remember for the discourse analysis, the next part of this work, that they both thrive in different age groups and that can impact the language they use, or the communication means that both candidates choose. Another piece of information to keep in

mind is that both are veterans in politics and therefore have developed a certain ease to talk and potentially seduce their electorate. Besides, it can be also expected that they will show animosity towards each other at times in their discourses as they have been doing that for years already and they were in direct competition with the election that was coming up very shortly when the discourses were held. Despite the literature firmly differentiating left and right-wing populism, it is already clear that they do nevertheless agree on certain key topics. The next part will confirm or discredit this tendency.

Chapter 4: Discourse analysis

Theme-based Analysis: Marine Le Pen

Meeting held at Fréjus on September 11, 2021

This speech was made 3 days after officially announcing her presidential candidacy. She talked about a multitude of subjects to briefly introduce her campaign overall. In her meeting discourse, the key word was freedom ("*liberté*"), which she presents herself as the ultimate defendant of. She also declares that freedom will be the main topic throughout her entire campaigning and, if elected, throughout her entire mandate and stated:

> "Well my friends, believe me, President of the Republic, in the face of those who want to attack our freedoms, French freedoms, I will not bend, I will not kneel, I will not surrender."

She uses the word freedom 84 times exactly in her discourses and in a variety of societal domains which are currently threatened according to her speech in Fréjus and for each object mentioned, she also describes how she plans to tackle the problem:
- freedom in healthcare for the medical personnel and the patients;
- political freedom (to make referendum and apply the results according to the will of the people);
- freedom to choose a trade union (to open free candidacy to professional elections);
- freedom of speech;
- individual freedom (especially in terms of data protection online);
- freedom of information (to privatize the audiovisual sector to guarantee it);
- freedom to circulate (to nationalize the highways, stabilize the price of fuels, put a halt to the green party's proposal that hurt the rural and impoverished population and free use of the trains during off-peak hours for the students and young employees);
- Physical and moral freedom, especially for women (to harden criminal offenses related to street harrassment and sexual abuses;
- And lastly, the freedom to choose whether to get vaccinated or not.

Meeting held in Marseille on November 22, 2021

It was a very intimist meeting with no journalists and other members of her party from the region. During that short speech, she did not explain any specific point of her program. Instead, she talked lengthily about the importance of France, the French nation, people, culture, civilization, and language and how all of these needed to shine again nationally and internationally. She also talks about how her party was a visionary and now everyone agrees with her party's views on topics such as immigration, which is the subject that she talked the most about during the entire meeting.

Overall, her message was that it is important for people to rally their colleagues, families, and friends to vote for her at the election, to make France as glorious as it can be, as she has never been closer to the winning the second round, with an estimated 45-48% in the surveys and would obviously need over 50% to win.

Meeting held in Mayotte on January 5, 2022

While introducing her project for Mayotte (investment in key infrastructures for waste disposal, education, maritime equipment and so on), which will all be regrouped into one single law that she plans on passing right after being elected, the main topic of her speech is immigration: she detailed the immigration reforms that she wishes to pass.

On top of that, she was also highly critical of Macron and how he handled Mayotte and more particularly, the immigration problem there. She made it clear that there is a direct correlation between immigration and insecurity as shown in the following extract:

> "Yes, I am not afraid to make the link between insecurity and immigration, as the facts show every day that in Mayotte, even more than elsewhere, crime and delinquency are first and foremost linked to the flood of illegal immigration."

Meeting held at Reims on February 7, 2022

She first starts her speech by talking about Reims and describes it as the cradle of the French civilization. She further adds that the people present at the meeting as well as people watching the meeting online have a very important thing in common: this deep love for France.

> "You who are gathered here in Reims, the cradle of our thousand-year-old history, and you who follow us throughout France and whom I greet, we have a thing in common. A deep feeling that animates us, that inhabits our thoughts, that determines our choices. A feeling that also guides our actions, that gathered us here in this city where France was born. This thing in common is the love of the country, the sacred love of the country."

She goes on by describing the beauty of France, how the nation was built. She then follows with another topic: the presidency of Macron. She explicitly describes it as a total disaster and names multiple things she holds him responsible for: the further indebtment of the country, the sale of tech French industries, the rise of energy prices, the expensive wind turbines ruining the economy and the landscapes, the standstill of unemployment levels, the Covid crisis and the list goes on.

After extensively talking about how Macron's presidency was a catastrophe, she announces that if elected her first mission will be to break the vicious circle of defeatism in France. She plans on doing that through multiple actions:

- Restoring security by giving more means to justice, remaining a nuclear power, re-investing into the French army massively and leaving NATO;
- Protecting France from the danger that is brought up by immigrants and burden they represent for French public services, hospitals, housing, administrative resources, and economic means. These services and resources should only be available to French people. Furthermore, she rejects a multicultural society where other lifestyles, values and cultures try to force their existence onto France, especially Islam;
- Changing the current dynamics of the economy with a program that promises giving back to 200 euros per months to every household accompanied by a VAT reduction on fuels and electricity, valorizing made-in-France and small French businesses and enterprises and facilitating family inheritance among other things;

- Revitalizing and re-enriching the healthcare system, the hospitals, the nursing homes and their respective personnel as well as making sure that people with disabilities are taken care of;
- Creating a ministry dedicated to all the existing kinds of fraud, which will allow to restore money stolen from the State. That money will then be re-injected into her new other policies;
- Protecting the French family farming and re-equilibrate France to stop the fracture between urban and rural living;
- Encouraging the youth and young workers, through tax reductions and bonuses;
- Favoring family life, especially helping single-parent households, and financially supporting French families, increasing teachers' salaries to create better education and indexing pensions.

To conclude her meeting, she talked about her personal life and history, how she was always surrounded by politics and has acquired the experience needed for the presidency.

Meeting held in Vallauris on February 11, 2022

Le Pen dedicated this meeting to immigration solely. She identifies migration as the principal threat to France and the French nation. She talks about the impact of massive immigration to France, in terms of cultural but also economic damages. She goes on by listing the measures she will adopt once elected, starting with the referendum which will allow her to pass the majority of her plan for immigration and assert the dominance of the French constitution over everything, including for example but not exclusively the Marrakesh Pact for Migration, the European Union and International Law. Instead of building a physical wall, she talks about erecting a judicial wall to prevent migration. She also explains that the money that she will recuperate from diverse help given to migrants in France, that she estimates to 16 billion euros will be funding the rest of her policies.

Meeting held in Vienne on February 19, 2022

This meeting was dedicated to economy and security. She started off by criticizing Macron and how his presidency contributed to the rising insecurity felt by the citizens in France. She also briefly mentioned that he was the ultimate culprit of France's increasing debt and external

commerce deficit. She talked about the economic measures she wants to implement such as the lowering of the VAT on energy, reduced taxation and increase in salaries.

After talking about her economic measures, she moved onto the other main subject of that meeting: security. She claims that the French people are feeling unsafe in the streets, in their homes, everywhere. She then talks about her measures to restore safety and security in France, one of them being the restoration of the strength of the judiciary system by hiring more police officers. She names migrants and drugs as the two main reasons to why insecurity has been rising.

Meeting held at Aigues-Mortes on March 5, 2022

Marine Le Pen started this meeting by talking about the situation in Ukraine (for contextualization, this was her first meeting since Russia's invasion of the Ukrainian territory). She condemned Russia's actions and further said that it was against Ukraine's right to sovereignty. She also said that France would host Ukrainian refugees, as this solidarity is legitimate. She agreed with the economic sanctions that were taken at the time but mentioned that France should not declare total economic war on Russia and that French citizens should not have to pay the price of these sanctions (the State should compensate). Lastly on that subject, she mentioned that it was important to leave diplomatic canals open with both Ukraine and Russia.

Following this topic, the rest of the speech was dedicated to an assessment of Macron's quinquennium which, in brief, she describes as a total economic, social, and political disaster. She stressed that on top of that, it had been characterized by a peak in uncontrolled migration and a vast problem of security (this echoes what she had already said in other meetings). Furthermore, she names Islamism as of the serious threat to the French freedom, values, and republican and constitutional principles.

Additionally, she states that the worst outcome of the Macron presidency was the division of French people. This is illustrated by the extract that follows:

> "But perhaps the worst of the mandate, of the quinquennium of Emmanuel Macron's five-year term is the division of the French people: social division, territorial division,

health division, and contempt, this incredible class contempt, and the poison of division is insinuating itself everywhere, spreading in a pervasive way throughout society: nauseating racialism, radical feminism of hatred of men, or again in an uninhibited way repeated calls to anti-police violence or anti-French racism which are only the mark of an aggressive secessionism.

Our polytraumatized, poly-fractured country invents every day new reasons to divide itself, to oppose itself, to sink into corrosive debates, invented resentments or demands of repentance as if everything had to be a pretext to set the French against each other."

She ended the meeting by briefly touching on the situation of the future of energy of which she highlighted three pillars: nuclear energy, hydroelectricity and hydrogen.

Meeting held in Bouchain on March 11, 2022

She mentioned her program again, nothing that hadn't mentioned previously: her plan for education, healthcare, boosting the demography in France (instead of resorting to immigration, the answer lies into pushing policies that encourage families to have children), the immigration problems, how she plans to solve them and the referendum she plans on having, helping small enterprises, re-investing into justice (hiring more people in the police force, more magistrates, more places in prison) , re-indexing the pensions, giving better pay to the farmers. She also gives details about the financing of her actions, through money not spent on immigrants and reclaimed fraud money (but no precise budgeting apart from mentioning this). She also criticized Macron throughout the entire speech.

Meeting held in Saint-Martin-Lacaussade on March 26, 2022

In this meeting relatively close to the first round of the presidential election, Le Pen discussed a few subjects she hadn't developed yet such as ecology, (de)urbanization, and agriculture.

Le Pen mentioned this concept of de-urbanization in other meetings but had never fully explained why nor had she developed her plan of action on the subject truly before. She explains that she wishes to re-equilibrate the territories and that the rapid growth of big cities had been

done at the expense of vital investment in infrastructures in smaller towns and cities. She plans on reversing that trend and invest massively into rural hubs.

Following that logic and seeing the current trends, namely inflation and globalization gaining importance, her plan of re-structuration for rural areas is completed by a re-valuation of arable land and of the agricultural occupations (whether growing cereals, vegetables, or grape vines). She proposes to stop importing food items and start planting it nationally instead. The surplus would then be used for trade once the French demand would be met.

Following all of that, she plans on creating a ministry dedicated to frauds of all kinds, as she had already mentioned, but she adds that this ministry would also control the alimentation imports to make sure that they meet the French standards required by law.

For the environmental question, Le Pen wants a transition that is realistic; for example, she condemns the European Union plan to ban non-hybrid or non-electric cars in 2035. She arguments that cars must remain accessible to everyone, and these options currently are not ready to meet the high demands nor affordable. She also talks about giving incentives to French industries to develop greener and smarter alternatives instead.

While the subjects here above were the main themes of the meeting, she also mentioned her law against Islamism, the intra-EU workers' migration (she disagrees with the free movement of workers inside the Union), her project to nationalize the highways and Macron's abandonment of nuclear power plants (more precisely: how his decision led to increasingly high energy prices).

Meeting held at Stiring-Wendel on April 1, 2022

In this very short speech, Marine Le Pen does not express anything new so far. She talks about the McKinsey case, how Macron chose to pay an expensive American private firm, which on top of that has been discovered to not be paying its taxes in France for years, was chosen to complete a task that France has an administration responsible for. She further says that this case raises the questions of who is sovereign in France and who really leads the country? She blames globalization and neo-liberalism as well as Macron for taking the sovereign power that belongs

to the French people. If elected president, she promises to include a possibility for popular initiative referendums.

She concluded on a few words about how her program was finished and ready to be started as soon as she would be elected.

Meeting held in Perpignan on April 7th, 2022

This was the last meeting held by Le Pen, 3 days before the first round of the election. She insists again on how important it is for people to vote, which is why she named this meeting "when the people vote, the people win" ("*Si le peuple vote, le peuple gagne*"). She insists that it is time for change, and for a woman at the head of the Republic, which would be a first historically. She repeated all the main themes of her campaign and the changes that she will establish if elected. She therefore talked about the public and defense sectors, immigration, security, fraud, nursing homes and healthcare, social aids, special rights for the French nationals, the EU, the economy, the policies to raise the deficit in French demographics, inheritance, pensions, education and the youth. After all of this, she finished on her usual "Long live to the Republic, long live to France!" ("*vive la République, vive la France!*").

Theme-based Analysis: Jean-Luc Mélenchon

Meeting held online on November 28, 2020

Mélenchon had publicly declared that he would only be a candidate to the French presidency if he managed to get 150,000 signatures. To celebrate reaching that number and officially introduce his campaign, he held his first meeting online. Mélenchon actually used his own candidacy to introduce a law he wished to pass about citizen recommendation for the presidential election (the current system requires politician signatures, but Mélenchon proposed to introduce a system of citizen signatures instead). He emphasizes the crucial importance of 2022, a total turning point according to him in various matters: the presidential elections but also the reimbursement of the debt, the progression of poverty, and the French presidency of the European Union.

He also talks about a variety of subjects in that meeting, the ones he talked extensively about where all related to a reform of the state. According to him, the state and the entire public sector (whether the energy, transportation or the healthcare system) are in bad shapes and need deep transformation. Furthermore, he dedicates a large part of his communication to speak about the police and the danger of the law concerning the global security ("*la loi sur la sécurité globale*"). He described that law to be atrocious on every single point and argued that it should not exist as it aims at over-controlling the French population. He goes on to mention that currently, France is an authoritarian regime, and he lists his ideas to remedy to that. He further emphasizes the importance of secularism ("*la laicité*"), where the state is laic, but people have the freedom (and he insists on that word specifically) to choose and exercise a religion, any religion.

He resumes his program in the following sentence:

> "Therefore, the program we have is summarized in one sentence, saying that we fight for the harmony of human beings with each other and with nature."

Meeting held online on April 10, 2021

Mélenchon called this meeting, which was primarily and heavily centered on water, "the Earth is our common homeland" ("*la terre est notre patrie commune*").

As already understood by his first meeting: the respect of the environment is crucial for Mélenchon. During this meeting particularly focused on water, which he admitted to choosing because it facilitates the understanding of political ecology as a more concrete factor, he adds that water is a natural phenomenon but became a political one under capitalism because of its increasing scarcity.

During this meeting, he talks about a lot of water-related topic: the water cycle, the water scarcity, droughts, electricity production using water, melting ice caps, the privatization of water dams for an EU project, water as a necessity for nuclear cooling, water pollution caused by pesticides and so on. He insists that French people have a responsibility towards water and that France has been downplaying its role on the matter for too long. He introduces a few of its proposals for water and ecology overall but the golden rule remains human must not consume

more than the Earth produces at the same time. This will be further developed in other meetings, the one in Martinique particularly.

Meeting held at Aubin on May 16, 2021

Mélenchon named this meeting "full employment[1] to repair France" ("*Le plein emploi pour réparer la France"*) and as guessed from the title it talks about his plan towards massively reducing unemployment through re-development of public services such as education, the increase of the minimum salary to 1400 euros (known as the "*SMIC*" in France), retirement at 60 years old, favoring French industries, working week limited to 35 hours and so on.

He also talked about the climate crisis in his discourse as well briefly, and how he links it to his economic plan for France. According to him, all these economic changes first need to happen through political change. He describes that political change only possible if the French people unite (in other words: believe and vote for his program).

Meeting held in Valence on August 29, 2021

In this meeting labeled "abstention votes Macron" ("*L'abstention vote Macron*"), the principal theme and idea conveyed was how important it is to vote for the French citizens. This can be resumed by the following short extract:

> "If you abstain, you will be supporting a minority that is socially selfish, philosophically irresponsible, and finally, a minority that has no concern for the destiny of the human race and the community of human beings who, regardless of their nationality, religion or gender, are similar in their needs, in their basic necessities, which, if they are not satisfied, only produce disorder, chaos, struggle, suffering and violence."

While this was the main theme of the meeting, he also briefly talked about other subjects such as the creolization[2] of the French people, the impact of ecology on his program (for Mélenchon, there is no question of ecological transition, instead he insists on the words "ecological

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[1] "Full employment is an economic situation in which all available labor resources are being used in the most efficient way possible. Full employment embodies the highest amount of skilled and unskilled labor that can be employed within an economy at any given time." (Potters, 2021)

[2] "Creolization is a term referring to the process by which elements of different cultures are blended together to create a new culture." (Webster, 2016)

bifurcation", which consists of radical changes in production and consumption) and the critique of NATO, capitalism and globalization, as well other political opponents (Macron, Le Pen, Zemmour). This critique of political opponents is recurrent in almost every meeting he held.

Meeting held in Reims on October 17, 2021

The three main themes of this meeting were nuclear energy, the French budget (retirement age and pension fundings, budget deficit under Macron, employment policies) and a critique of the current international order under NATO, the European Union and capitalism. He was also highly critical of Macron's policies throughout the entire meeting, but that happens at every single meeting.

These will be more defined in the next meetings, but it is interesting to note that at that point of the presidential race, Mélenchon supported leaving the European Union. As he mentioned, when a treaty is signed and ratified, it becomes binding, and it is no longer possible to reconsider certain points of that treaty. This explains why he proposed to leave the treaties of the Union, which would imply to leave like the British did. As Mélenchon mentioned, his program is evolutive and bound to the will of the people, which explains why he will discontinue to use that argument later in the presidential campaign.

Meeting held in Guadeloupe on December 16, 2021

In this meeting, Mélenchon talked about a lot of subjects he had already previously mentioned such as his opposition to the vaccinal pass and nuclear power plants, and the problem of water and soil pollution.

He talked extensively about his plan for Guadeloupe: how to apply food, medical, educational, and energetic autonomy there. In terms of French overseas territories in general, Mélenchon said he would allow some differences in the law under the conditions that they would not violate public freedom nor essential laws.

He also added that if elected, fixed-term contracts would not be allowed in the public sector anymore, and neither would the use of repetitive temporary contracts. Furthermore, he stated that under his presidency, respect for the social rights of workers would be a serious matter and that he would force employers to respect them.

He further talked about his project for France: to draw up a new constitution and enter in the era of the 6th Republic. This is essential for him as the conditions in 1958 in which the current constitution was drafted were very different. A new constitution would also allow to rebalance the powers, as the 5th Republic allows the executive (in other words, the president) to have much power on the legislative. A new constitution would therefore put an end to what Mélenchon calls the "Presidential Monarchy". This would allow the people to redefine themselves as well claims Mélenchon.

On a very different topic, creolization, he added that it was not a "political project" (as a reaction to what other candidates to the presidential election had called it, namely: Zemmour) but a 100% positive project and a cultural process.

Once again, ecology was one of the central themes of the meeting and kept coming up every few minutes and even declared that at this point, dealing with climatic challenge was inevitable.

Meeting held in Martinique on December 18, 2021

This meeting was named "autonomy is the key to freedom and equality" ("*l'autonomie est la clé de la liberté et de l'égalité*") and that sentence resumes very well the whole idea and theme of the meeting and even his program. Mélenchon, in his previous meeting already talked about this idea that humans, among themselves, and with nature need to live in harmony. In his speech in Martinique, he develops that idea by saying that it is only achievable through autonomy: in healthcare (medical self-sustainment), in agriculture (France no relies on food importation – instead it produces what it needs and breaks free from capitalism and the free market economy) and in energy (using green and renewable energies that respect nature).

To introduce his entire plan for the French autonomy, he started off by talking about the Covid-19 pandemic, how it was mishandled by the government and how he would handle it. He brought up again the issue of the retirement age, that should be 60 indisputably for Mélenchon, which he insists is the primary reason why he refuses to associate with other left parties. He makes a clear link between the pandemic and the need for political change: according to him,

Covid-19 is the result of capitalism, for two reasons. Firstly, it is the result of zoonoses[3], which he says is a political phenomenon as it is caused by animal farming overexploitation. Secondly, it is devastating because of co-morbidity factors such as cardio-vascular diseases or diabetes, which also are a consequence of the political regime. He describes capitalism as an economic but also consumption and life model. These co-morbidity factors are caused by capitalism and the way people consume food (he points out massive sugary, salty and oily food over-consumption and pesticides poisoning particularly).

Once he established that, he presented how his program is going to resolve all these issues: through agricultural, medical and energetic autonomy. As France would no longer be bound to capitalism, it would change politically (through the election of Mélenchon and his program) but also economically (where free markets would no longer be the norm and neither would capitalism). He details his goal for agriculture: to manage to produce nationally everything needed, issued 100% from biological agriculture (he plans to ban the use of pesticide) and hire and train more farmers. He claimed that all of this is possible as he has already calculated and planned everything.

Meeting held in Nantes on January 16, 2022

He started off this meeting by denouncing the capitalist system and introduced how he would assure wealth redistribution inside of France with measures such as bigger taxation on higher revenue and big inheritances would be taken by the state (he allows 12 million but anything over that 12 million is seized) to redistribute to the youth. He plans on giving students a monthly allowance of a little bit over a thousand euros.

Next, he talked about the question of nuclear disarmament, he would give up French nuclear power. He re-insisted on the idea that France should become a moral and intellectual superpower, nothing else. He further talked about a fight to de-merchandize the space as he believes that it should not belong to anyone (contrarily to what the Americans do currently). Moreover, he talks about building the first space university.

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[3] "A zoonosis is any disease or infection that is naturally transmissible from vertebrate animals to humans" (World Health Organization, 2020).

Following that, he talked about internet: the need to build French infrastructure for internet, nationalize where the data is kept and so on. He moved on to the sea next, which is according to him, the very key to leave nuclear energy: the "energy" of the sea. He ended up his allocution about sea by talking about immigrants dying at sea. He quotes immigration as the number one factor that allowed progress in the history of humanity. He wishes to treat the problem of immigration where it starts: in the origin countries of the migrants, therefore reassessing the need for France to be a moral superpower.

To finish, he talked about the necessity to create a 6th Republic, how it is an absolute necessity to secure the French freedoms and the respect of human rights and dignity in France.

Meeting held in Strasbourg on January 19, 2022

The two main themes discussed at this meeting were the European Union and ecology. He enunciated different issues in the working of the European Union for France. His solution: not apply any EU treaties' aspect that goes against his program while remaining in the Union. This is in contradiction with what he declared in Reims precedingly. Nevertheless, he assured that this type of behavior from France would allow it to get back full control over its sovereignty. He also plans on applying that strategy while being at the head of the EU presidency if elected. He also developed his program's key sentence highlighted in the extract from the meeting online in November 2020, and specifically why he always talks about ecological matters so often. He explains:

> "[…] if there is no harmony between human beings, it means that they are divided, it means that some take advantage of others, it means that some accumulate on the back of others, but what do they accumulate? The destruction of nature, of raw materials, which are taken without anyone caring how they are going to be replenished. This is why we have said that we will put in the French constitution the Green Law, that is to say: from now on, we must never take more than what nature is able to reconstitute."

Meeting held in Bordeaux on January 24, 2022

The central subject of the meeting was food: production, consumption, but also diabetes, high arterial pressure and other food consumption linked disease. Mélenchon says that eating is a political subject and the policies related to it that he wants to apply are the following:

stabilization of the price of essential goods, definitive and immediate closing of all the meat factory farms of the country, regulation of the allowed proportion of salt and sugar in the food produced, ban of pesticides and carcinogenic conservators.

The other half of the meeting was dedicated to scarcity and poverty. First, he plans to appoint to a permanent function the temporary contracts personnel in the public functions. Then, he plans to ban detached workers from other (European) countries. He will also increase the salary of teachers and give them better work conditions.

Lastly, he mixes these two central themes of food and poverty to talk about agriculture and the measures he will take, concerning food autonomy for the country for example. He explains why all these changes are necessary and interlinked in the following extract:

> "Our political awareness must integrate this idea that not only are we fighting against an economic system, against a social system, but we are also fighting against a vision of our own place in the universe and in nature."

Meeting held in Tours on February 3, 2022

In this meeting, the main central theme was how the free market was chaos. Mélenchon holds it responsible for the destruction of multiple domains of society: he gave the example of retiring homes, healthcare, education, and public services. He then talked about how he would apply wealth re-distribution and how the domains cited hereabove would be on its beneficiary list. While talking about his dissemination of the illegitimately accumulated wealth of the richest, he criticized once again the capitalist system that allowed them to do so.

He concluded his meeting on a proposal to the French communist party to rally with *L'union Populaire* and he would for that account be willing to hold a referendum on the nuclear question.

Meeting held in Montpellier on February 13, 2022

In his speech, Mélenchon denounced the "parasitism of financial capitalism", the current system under which the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. He plans on breaking up with that system if elected by changing the taxation system and inheritance law,

redistributing the money into his different projects: employment, ecology, the youth and education.

Meeting held on the Reunion Island on February 26, 2022

The main point of this speech was peace and how in the current light of the situation in Ukraine, it is more important than ever. He called for a de-escalation and requests France to step up and propose a ceasefire. He then re-iterated the interest of France being a non-aligned country.

He also mentioned his plan for the island, notably his investment in route and agricultural infrastructure while insisting on the necessity to leave the market economy for the ecological planification instead.

Lastly, he talked about his project for the French-speaking community with the establishment of a "French Sea University" to allow French-speaking people to educate themselves on water-related issues and to be able to participate in the future vision of Mélenchon for the environment.

Meeting held in Paris on March 20, 2022

In this meeting, Mélenchon re-iterated a few of the key changes that his presidency would bring such as retirement at 60, higher pensions, higher minimum salary. He talks about the increase of the price of fuel and how under his presidency, the maximum price would be fixed by his government. He restated how market economy was chaos and the crucial importance for education. He named education as the fabricant of the French people. He talked lengthily about that subject of education, and how France should become a great power in terms of education, knowledge, know-how, language, sports, arts, in other words: France as a moral superpower.

He then moved onto the subject of how this quinquennium of Macron was characterized by a diminution in freedoms of all kinds. Democracy is declining and this is why Mélenchon wants to create a 6th Republic, to end the "Presidential Monarchy".

He also re-stated his position against Free Market economy and how it was destructive for the human people but also for nature. For these reasons, Mélenchon wants to apply alter-globalism ("*alter mondialisme*").

Lastly, he insisted on the significance and usefulness to take part in the vote for the upcoming presidential election.

Meeting held in Marseille on March 27, 2022

Mélenchon started off this meeting by talking about the ongoing war in Ukraine. He clarified his position on the subject: ceasefire in Ukraine and end of the Russian invasion. He highlighted that what was happening in Ukraine was echoing two subjects he had already talked a lot about in his other meetings: food dependency and the risk of nuclear energy. He said that he would be in favor to deploy United Nations blue helmets to guard Ukrainian centrals in order to avoid a global catastrophe and to even, if necessary, deploy French troops for that mission.

He used this to illustrate why the international position of France needs to change: he wants France to be non-aligned and decide on case-by-case basis where the French loyalty would go. In résumé, he wants France to be non-aligned, but also sovereign, independent, and capable to defend itself but more importantly to be capable of fostering international peace.

Back to his national program, he proposed to block the prices of fuel, electricity, staple products, and basic necessities. He also offers to bring back public services all over France, 100% covered medical expenses, drinkable water in the French overseas territories and build more housings as well as working on the thermal rehabilitation of the current infrastructures and buildings. He would furthermore ban posted, also known as detached, workers in France.

Another major topic of this meeting was education. Lastly, he spent the last part of his speech to talk about the common economic policies of Macron and Le Pen which he is completely against.

Meeting held in Toulouse on April 3, 2022

Firstly, it is noteworthy to add that this was the penultimate meeting before the first round of the 2022 French presidential election. Mélenchon already had plenty of meetings where he had the opportunity to present his program. In Toulouse, for this meeting that he named "for the state, against corruption" (*"Pour l'état, contre la corruption"*), he talked about his vision of the state where the public service has a key function to play as shown by the explicit extract here

after. He is also highly critical of Macron and the role that he played in the deterioration of that public services. He also condemns the programs of Le Pen and Zemmour.

> "The state is the tool of the general interest and that is why we need a public service protected by an extremely firm status, because any human organization has defects, but these defects will be even greater when this organization is dedicated to profits and greed rather than to the general interest and dedication to others. This is why the status of the public services will be re-established everywhere, at all levels, with the same rigor and its five principles: impartiality, neutrality, equal treatment of users, secularity, continuity of the public services."

The second key theme highlighted in this meeting is ecology, and more specifically water scarcity. He describes lengthily how water is crucial and endangered, especially in the French overseas territories of Mayotte, Guadeloupe, Guyana, and Reunion. He also mentions how he plans to vote an emergency law to develop infrastructure for the immediate access to drinkable water in these areas. For mainland territory, he foresees to act according to the needs of each municipality.

Meeting held in Lille on April 5, 2022

This meeting was quite special: Mélenchon's hologram was simultaneously retransmitted in 11 other major cities. He started off by insisting on how close his party was to winning and that he intends to create the most extraordinary political bifurcation of all history.

Next, he talked a lot about Le Pen and pointed out incoherence in her speeches and actions. He also mentioned Macron and how his application of neoliberalism was slowly killing the public services, quoting how Macron removed over 17,000 hospital beds in his quinquennium. He re-iterated his general critique of how Macron handles the state as a business or a company.

Following that, he insisted on the compelling need to "re-humanize" society and then lengthily talked about how under his presidency he will assure that gender equality is established and respected.

As it was his last planned meeting before the election, Mélenchon talked once again about the importance of voting and that the future of France was depending on that and by consequence, of the public mobilization to go vote.

Theme-based Analysis: comparison

Now that all the thematic used in Le Pen and Mélenchon's meetings have been enunciated and their campaign discourses reviewed, it is possible to directly compare them to see where they converge and diverge. Mélenchon held 17 meetings and Le Pen 11 in total. While Mélenchon's meetings do become repetitive after a while, there is always new elements he presents in every speech and the repetition on certain topics adds for the overall cohesion of the program. Some of Le Pen's discourses barely introduce her project, they are empty of any real plan of action for her potential election as president but rather go towards her public and prevalent opinions about immigration or Islam.

Before going further, it is important to note that while the subject of this work was the campaign meetings exclusively, both candidates also engaged in televised debates, but also published press releases, published content on social media and held conferences as well. The fact that Mélenchon had more meeting and lengthier speeches does not necessarily imply that he was more involved in campaigning than Le Pen or that his program was more developed even though it turned out to be the case.

In addition, it is interesting to see how they developed their discourses and the genres they chose to adopt. In terms of style and discourse construction, they are both very different. Le Pen typically starts with "my dear friends" and a very flattering description of the place where the meeting is held. She also finishes typically with "*vive la France, vive la République*". This outro is also shared by Mélenchon. Additionally, he always concludes its meetings by quoting a person: either a politician, a philosopher, a scientist, or a poet. As mentioned above, Mélenchon has lengthier speeches, typically over an hour long. He exhibited a much more pronounced tendency towards the use of long detailed descriptions, of situations, locations, or historical events for example. He showed that trait much more then Le Pen.

As expected, both were very comfortable talking in front of crowds. They also presented their extensive experience in politics as a major advantage. Additionally, in relation to what Van Dijk had mentioned about figures of authority, a classification in which both politicians fit, that they have a privilege to have a larger diffusion of their discourses: that has been proven by the large crowds that assisted to the meetings of both Le Pen and Mélenchon. Their status not only gave them an easier access to massive groups of people but also an opportunity to talk about various subjects with very few chances to be criticized and create a rejection from their electoral bases who, to some extend at least, trust them as figures of power.

In terms of subject diversification, Le Pen had a few central themes that came back in all her discourses, typically: immigration, the importance of the nation, Islam, employment but Mélenchon had a much-varied array of thematic, he talked about a lot of different subjects whereas Le Pen only sticked to a few main ones.

The two politicians have a lot of central ideas that converge and repetitively (re)appear as observed in the thematic descriptions of the meetings. First, they both put a high emphasis on the crucial need to re-invest in the French public sector (public administration, healthcare, education, necessary infrastructures and so on) and the urgency to protect French companies, whether small businesses or tech giants from unfair international competition. While this theme is common to both, they do not fully agree on the basis of why this needs to be done. For Le Pen, it is a question of honoring the French nation and its "*savoir-faire*" but for Mélenchon, it also comes with an ecological dimension that is absent from Le Pen's argumentation on the subject: it is better for the environment to produce in France (less transportation and so on). This question of re-valuation of the French industries also fits with their plan to boost employment, which was another dominant item on both agendas.

One more common topic that was omnipresent during their meetings was Macron's presidency. He was mentioned several times in every single discourse of both. He was critiqued on every possible subject. As a reference, Le Pen mentioned his name 110 times and Mélenchon 157 times overall. This only represents the occurrences where they cited his name directly, to that needs to be added all the time where they used other qualificatives for him or implicitly talked about him. While Le Pen was only condemning Macron, and his government members at times, Mélenchon additionally fulminated against several other politicians too: Zemmour and Pécresse,

but also and mainly Le Pen. On the other hand, she did not mention him directly even once in her meetings.

Another subject that was central to both was nuclear energy. While both talked about it in numerous meetings, it is noteworthy to add that their opinions on the matter are radically opposed. While Le Pen wishes to continue to use nuclear power plants and even build more, Mélenchon wishes to resort to other sources to eventually replace nuclear energy by greener means of producing electricity. This is overall very coherent with his program putting a high emphasis on environmental protection and ecology. Their visions on the topic can be summarized in the table hereafter:

Nuclear Energy	
Jean Luc Mélenchon	**Marine Le Pen**
• Completely against, very negative connotation	• In favor, totally positive connotation
• Plan to stop using the existing nuclear power plants	• Plan to continue to use the existing nuclear power plants
• Do not want to build more and stop the ongoing construction of the evolutionary power reactor	• Plan to build more power plants, the future is nuclear energy
• Consider other greener means of energy, such as offshore wind turbines	• Against wind turbines, but support hydroelectricity and hydrogen
• Hidden cost: the constant danger of a malfunctioning of a reactor causing the possible death or injury to humans as well as to the eco-system	• Cheapest and easiest energetic production method according to her
• No need for the nuclear in his plan for energetic autonomy	• Highly supported for the argument of energy independence from other countries
• Waste too hard to dispose of, bad for the environment	• Carbon free energy: no environmental problem
• Give up French nuclear power	• Keep French nuclear power

From all the elements highlighted above in the text and in the table, it can be concluded that the nuclear question, particularly the energetic aspect of it, became of floating signifier in the analyzed discourses. Both politicians gave it its own meaning and it therefore became empty signifier for each as seen by their opposed articulation of the subject in their discourses. To go back to discourse theory wording, the different positions presented here-above serve as nodal points in their discourse's construction.

Additionally, Islam was another central theme for both politicians but was dominant and reoccurring very often in Le Pen's discourses. Just as for the topic of nuclear energy, they have antagonistic attitudes towards it. Le Pen demonized that religion repeatedly throughout her meetings while Mélenchon defended it explicitly several times.

Here below is a short extract from Le Pen's speech in Reims in February 2022:

"With Islamism, our most essential values are swept away: secularism, diversity, equality between men and women, freedom of expression with the return of the crime of blasphemy, the freedom to believe or not to believe, the freedom to teach or to inform."

Mélenchon does not share her views on Islam at all. To exemplify that, an extract from his speech in Valence in August 2021:

"And whatever the cost, we will bear it, we will never accept that the French people in its Muslim component is demonized by this small aggressive and hateful band which would like us to spend our time wondering which religion we are. Well, we will say that everyone does as he wishes, as long as it respects the law and the dignity of the others."

In relations to that topic, they have distinctive thoughts on the definition and application of a secular state, religion (especially Islam), immigration and power. All these can be justified by their polar ideals for the future of France and the meaning of the French Republic. This is further illustrated in the following table:

French Republic	
Jean Luc Mélenchon	**Marine Le Pen**
• Biggest threats: power abuses from the President and climate crisis	• Biggest threats: Islam and immigration
• Create a 6th Republic	• Bring France into the 3rd Millennium
• Has a program for the country	• Has project for the country
• The State must be secular, but people have the freedom to exercise any religion, secularism is not equivalent to atheism of state	• Religions are merely "opinions", application of secularism in the state institutions but also public space, administrations, and enterprises
• Creolization is a natural, positive process	• Integration is necessary, the French culture is endangered
• Stricter laws reduce the liberty due to the French people, against the recent laws on global security and so on passed by the government	• High levels of insecurity currently, call for even stricter laws and condemnations
• France as a moral power that shows the rest of the world that another alternative lifestyle is possible in harmony between the humans themselves and nature	• France as an economic, influential, respected leading world power

While this could even be further detailed, these elements overall coincide with the idea that the Republic serves a floating signifier. Both Le Pen and Mélenchon have very different ideas over the equivalence of the meaning of the word "Republic". The semantic blur around that word becomes relatively significant. As covered in this table as well, it could be further said that the words "power" and "secularism" as well serve as empty signifiers in their respective discourses. The struggle over the hegemony of the meaning of their singular and particular perspective is present here and even further illustrated by their intensive critics of dissident opinions.

Now that the common major themes have been detailed and the signifiers defined, it is time to turn towards the subjects that are owned by each. While some recuring topics presented by both examined persons may have been the same, they also each addressed items that the other rarely addresses, or in some cases, that the other does not mention at all.

To exemplify, the ecological issue is central to the program of Mélenchon while Le Pen only mentioned it on a few rare occasions. She mentions a slow transition towards an eco-friendlier lifestyle, vague statements on the subjects of cars or energy production but what Mélenchon proposes is a complete turnaround, he calls his project for ecology to be a "*bifurcation*". He mentioned that topic multiples times through every single one of his meetings. She only talked about it in Saint-Martin-Lacaussade and mentioned exclusively a re-localization and investment into the French automobile industries to develop better technologies as she judges that the current hybrid or electric cars are too expensive and nowhere near able to handle the high demand a complete transition to these alternatives would ask for. She also would like to remove the wind turbines in France as they do not fit well into the landscapes and are too costly, as previously mentioned with the in-depth analysis of the nuclear question.

Moreover, Le Pen made the reduction of immigration one of the key missions of her project for the presidency. She promised a referendum, various new policies and so on. For a rough idea, she mentioned the word "immigration" no less than 80 times in all of her meetings. In Le Pen's discourses, immigration is always associated with the recuring theme of security. These subjects are also observed in Mélenchon's discourses but to a much lesser extent and are not associated with each other particularly. Le Pen's views on immigration are illustrated in the short following extract from her speech in Reims in February 2022:

> "In continuous waves, this uncontrolled immigration is transforming our streets, our neighborhoods, our cities into zones of no France. It installs ways of life that are not ours, it demands "accommodations" that are, in reality, for us French, the mark of a cultural denial. It translates into incessant communitarian demands that are often incompatible with who we are. It institutes an insidious separatism that always ends up becoming bellicose. It is the arrogant and sulphureous mayor of Trappes (Ali Rabeh) who said to Jordan (Jordan Bardella, member of Le Pen's party): "this multicultural society will come about by choice or by force".
> By force, but what a shocking confession!"

To conclude this thematic analysis, there is one more item worth mentioning. Le Pen and Mélenchon recurrently uses actuality or historic events in their discourses. In the case of Mélenchon, an event that comes up a considerable number of times, 15 to be precise, is the French Revolution of 1789, a time he describes as an ideal for the power of the people. Le Pen

mentions other events or actualities. In her case, there is a person that she quotes quite often: Charles De Gaulle. She repeatedly talked about him in laudatory terms and acknowledges the brilliant heritage he left for France. Mélenchon does not share that image of De Gaulle and his patrimony he left to the country. The reason why Mélenchon wants to change the constitution and turn towards a 6th Republic is because he disapproves that legacy: when De Gaulle drafted the constitution in 1958 and gave the executive power (the president) too much power over the legislative. This shows a real difference in what the golden age of France is for both Le Pen and Mélenchon and more importantly, towards what kind of system they would like to tend towards. Mélenchon repeatedly said that he wanted to end the abuse of power of the presidential position and end the "presidential monarchy", but Le Pen does not mention that about the position, she only mentions that Emmanuel Macron is the one abusing power. Nevertheless, both seemed to be quite fond of Jean Jaurès as he was quoted by Le Pen and Mélenchon a few times. This was the ideal illustration of the premises of CDA and DT: the understanding of history and culture is not universal as seen by the two different understandings of Le Pen and Mélenchon.

Rhetorical and Ideological Analysis

First and foremost, after getting familiar with the content of all meetings of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, their use of a populist rhetoric in their discourses was apparent. Even though Le Pen falls under right-wing populism and Mélenchon under left-wing, the rhetoric used by the two was indistinguishable. Furthermore, what the literature and the profile of the two studied personages had revealed shined through their discourses.

As seen during the review of the literature, populism is characterized by a discourse type displaying on the one hand the people oppressed and desperate for change and on the other hand, the elite who abuses from their power and wealth. In the case of Mélenchon what the literature had described for the elite in its use of populism was the "Europe of banks and the traditional political class" (Damiani, 2020, p. 2). From the discourse analysis, this has proven to be entirely true but rather incomplete. His definition of the elites is broader than these two categories. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the bureaucratic and technocratic European Union (not simply the European banking system), the President of the Republic (the position in general, which he finds holds too much power and is therefore illegitimate and undemocratic) must be added to be complete.

As to what really unifies the people that Mélenchon wants to represent, it is anyone and everyone who believes in his program. He puts a huge emphasis on that idea repeatedly in his discourses.

Now moving onto Le Pen, she considers the elites to be those responsible for the endangered French freedom and democracy, namely: the European Union (who has too much influence in matters of healthcare and immigration for example), the NGOs (who illegitimately act as moral authorities), NATO (who represents an unstable partnership) and the big private monopolies such as the American GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft) or the Chinese BATX (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and Xiaomi).

Furthermore, Le Pen claims to be the ultimate representant of the people – whom similarly to Mélenchon, declares that they are not tied to a particular age group, skin color, religion – but rather united through their immense love for France, for the nation, for the French culture, civilization, and language and therefore a strong belief in her project to restore France to its state of long-lost glory. While Le Pen describes the "people" using very inclusive terminology, a vast majority of her discourses are arguing against that as well as the scientific literature.

Coming back to that topic of the existing literature, Gerstlé and Nai (2019, p. 418-432) found that Marine Le Pen's populism was illustrated by the loathing of a part of the population. This finding also came through in her discourses. To be more precise, what shined through the analysis was that the target of her loathing was in vast majority migrants living in France and Islam believers. The analysis of the campaign meeting discourses, and the literature do oppose that image of her "inclusionary" people that she claims to be representing. Nevertheless, checking the truthfulness of the claims made by the two candidates to the presidential election is not the goal of this analysis, this is clearly one of the limitations of the chosen angle of this discourse analysis. Furthermore, qualitative data cannot be checked as simply as quantitative data but this is very coherent with other studies on right-wing populism. To further argument, Wodak (2013, p. 25) identified that extreme right political parties with nationalist-populist and chauvistinic slogans, a category in which Le Pen's party fits extremely well as discovered by her discourses, have adopted more "subtle (i.e. coded) forms of exclusion and racism".

Wodak (2013, p. 25) also states that this change in discourses allows for the expanding of the electoral support of these parties, these instead focus "on the protection of – seemingly homogenous – national identities or a mythical homeland". This is highly consistent with the trends seen in Le Pen's discourses as described in this analysis.

Back to Gerstlé and Nai (2019, p. 418-432), the authors also found out in their research that Mélenchon's populism was characterized by his use of informal language and was very anti-elitist. These two traits appeared very clearly in his discourses. He used very familiar and foul language at times, as illustrated by the following extract from the meeting in Valence in August 2021:

> "Abstention is definitely a trap for idiots (*piège à cons*). Afterall, more seriously, there are those who have repeated on all tones: "since we are not united, if we are not united, we have lost in advance". But very well, you have lost in advance, not us. The only fights that are lost in advance are those that we do not engage in."

A very intriguing phenomenon when it comes to Le Pen's discourse is how she personifies France. Mélenchon also talks about the country for instance, but in a different manner. For Le Pen's rhetoric, the idea of nation is crucial, and France is the motherland that must be saved at all costs. This is illustrated by the following extract from her meeting in Fréjus in September 2021:

> "In April 2022, it will be more than a vote: it will be a historic choice. You see, my friends, the eminent responsibility of our generation of French people, French people of all ages, all conditions, all religions, all origins.
>
> As in the moments of doubt that the country has gone through in the course of its history, and particularly at this moment when the warning lights are lighting up one after the other, the daughters and sons of France are called upon to stand up to engage in the recovery of the country.
>
> There will be no other defenders of our dear country than you. There will be no reconquest of French sovereignty without you.

There will be no better guarantor of your security than a nation restored in its foundations and its collective aspirations, than a united and determined nation, than a nation that protects its children, than a nation that knows that it has so much to contribute to the world."

Mélenchon also uses a sense of urgency and importance when talking about the upcoming presidential election in similar terms. While Le Pen mentions the crucial need to restore and protect the French nation, Mélenchon stands for the re-establishment of the authentic values of Republic and its three pillars: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity).

While it may seem a small detail, Le Pen and Mélenchon use to two different terms for their plan; she talks about a project, and he mentions a program. Using a general definition, projects typically refer to preparation of one single output while a program is a collection of projects (Brewitt, 2019). For both personages, the words were carefully chosen. Marine Le Pen has a single project: repair and restore the French nation. The nation is a crucial central element of Le Pen's project. To give an idea, she mentions the word 44 times combining all of her speeches.

Le Pen talked about her project in all her meetings but perhaps the most representative extract can be read here after from her meeting in Reims in February 2022:

"My political project is to give the country the means to achieve greatness and to give the French people the means to achieve happiness. My project is to bring France into the 3rd millennium, to give it all the assets to face the world that is coming. As you can see, my plan is well thought out, wise and complete. It is quantified and perfectly balanced. It sets out a precise, solid, and immediately applicable roadmap. It outlines a clear path to prosperity, security, and national cohesion. It is not intended to be right or left-wing, it is addressed to all French people, it is a project for France.

A France proud of its values and its history, a France resolutely turned towards the future, a France that believes in work and effort, a France that is united at home and respected abroad, a France that cares for the most vulnerable, a France that cares for its children, all its children, a happy France, a France that shines in the world."

On the other hand, Mélenchon has a program, with projects for the environment, the economy and so on, but most importantly: a radical change in the ways France operates. He wants a total turnaround in the functioning of the country. Mélenchon's program can be summarized by the following short extract from his meeting in Bordeaux in January 2022:

> "*L'avenir en commun* (the name of his program) is a program of transition from a form of capitalist society based on selfishness and greed to a society of mutual aid and solidarity."

Marine Le Pen and Mélenchon both also mentioned how they developed their plan for France: through citizen consultations, discussions with experts in different domains, syndicates, and various associations. They both assert that therefore, their plan represents the will of the people.

While Mélenchon represents left and Le Pen right-wing populism, the rhetoric used by the two is the same. This does not mean that they have the same ideas or ideologies, nonetheless. Put simply, their use of populism as a discourse type was identical: their way of talking about mobilizing the mass to vote, the technique employed to talk about and on the count of the people, the way to blame the elites for every wrongdoing in the French society, their manner of always presenting themselves as the only solution, their processes of always assessing their legitimacy to talk and make claims on the behalf of the people, the recuring critiques of the elites, all those, were the same. The words they made use of while displaying their populist rhetoric were so similar, they could practically be interchanged in both their discourses without one's noticing.

Ideologically speaking, there were also some similarities as well. Both were opposed to what they call capitalism for example, but Le Pen wishes to remain in the free-market economy while Mélenchon does not. He wants to apply what he calls "ecological protectionism". Nevertheless, both are against the ongoing process of globalization and the relocation of industries overseas. Instead, both wish to favor French production.

The two of them also plan to leave the European Market for Energy. They identify that market to be the reason why the energy prices in France are increasing and are certain that they would benefit a lot more from an internal French energy market. Where they disagree on the issue is the source of that energy as discussed earlier in the analysis.

Le Pen and Mélenchon are also very Eurosceptics, they dislike the workings of the European Union as they see it as a factor that hinders their national sovereignty. The 2005 European Constitution Referendum that was rejected by the French people illustrate, for both, how the Union forces France to follow its leadership. Both saw this event as a hijacking of the French democracy.

Another common object which both agree on is leaving NATO. Le Pen finds it to be an unstable partnership and wants to re-invest massively in the French defense while Mélenchon preaches for non-alignment: for France to decide on a case-by-case basis whom its allies and enemies are. He did mention that there was a need for more military personnel but his exact plan on the matter remains unclear in his discourses. He nevertheless did admit to favor diplomacy and talks, he made also clear that taking the arms should only be a question of last resort.

All in all, these two populist politicians are not that different on certain aspects of their work, but their core values are nevertheless clashing. At the surface, one may think that they are alike but beneath that, they are not. Mélenchon's program and Le Pen's project still display very different ideals of what France should be at the end of the day. They also disagree highly with each other's plans. A simple illustration of that is how Mélenchon criticized various aspects of Le Pen's project throughout his meetings.

Reflection and discussion

While this work was limited to a thematic, rhetorical, and ideological analysis, the same discourses could still be used for analysis under different angles, the feasibility of the measures proposed for example. It could have also been interesting to know how the discourse chosen by both politicians in meeting differ from their television appearances or conferences.

The vision both politicians have for France is nevertheless very ambitious but how their proposal would translate into real concrete actions and if they would be a success remains undetermined. As neither of them won the election, that question will remain unanswered.

Overall, the analysis of these discourses revealed in practice what the premises of CDA and DT state: knowledge truly is a product of discourses.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, this work has investigated the question of populism as a discourse type. It focused on the thematic, ideology and rhetoric mobilized in the discourses of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon using critical discourse analysis and discourse theory. The main objective of this work was to see how these two politicians addressed their electorate, what subject they bring up, what is their expression of "the people vs the elite" and compare all these different elements from their campaign meeting speeches.

The literature has shown that populism became a strong political force. While populism is found all over the European continent, its popularity amongst countries turned to be quite variable. What the literature pointed out was that in the countries where populist parties had a significant impact, these were singly dominating the populist scene. This brings up the unusual case of France, where both right and left-wing populism developed majorly, through the parties of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

As this work was using a definition of populism as a discourse type, the display of a dichotomy of the people versus the elite, it was then logic to see how populism was articulated concretely in discourses and if there was differences that could be observed between the right and left wing populist parties studied in this work in terms of thematic, ideology and rhetoric using combined approach of critical discourse analysis and discourse theory.

The popularization of both right and left-wing populism confirmed the fragmentation of the French society. Both Le Pen and Mélenchon have seemed to be very conscious about that and have made it their personal mission to unify the French people. That idea of bringing together France is repeated throughout their discourses.

Both turned out to have very different styles in ways to address their electorate. Nevertheless, their mobilization of populist rhetoric, despite being polar opposite of right and left representation, was identical: their way of talking about mobilizing the mass to vote, the technique employed to talk about and on the count of the people, the way to blame the elites for every wrongdoing in the French society, their manner of always presenting themselves as the only solution, their processes of always assessing their legitimacy to talk and make claims

on the behalf the people, the recuring critiques of the current political authorities, all those, were the same. This clearly demonstrates how easily populism as a discourse type graft itself onto the values, beliefs, and character of politicians.

Overall, they tended to agree on a considerable number of subjects as detailed in the discourse analysis; both were Eurosceptics, in favor of leaving NATO and the European Energy Market for example but they have fundamental differences that set them apart as well. The substances of their discourse were presenting two polar ideas for the future of France. On the one hand, Marine Le Pen presents herself as the savior of the French nation and the ultimate defendant of the French culture, civilization, and language. On the other hand, Mélenchon who insists on the crucial need for harmony between humans themselves and with nature before it is too late to act on the climate crisis.

These opposite core ideals for the future of France were also not designed with the representation of the same "people" in mind. While Mélenchon was very inclusive in his definition of the people, Le Pen tried to present herself under that light too but she, nevertheless, regularly pointed the finger at certain groups of society: namely immigrants and Islam believers, which does not coincide with the inclusionary but rather exclusionary type of populism. This also coincides with the conclusion of the literature on the subject.

As mentioned here above, they were very critical of the European Union and NATO. They both identify them as the elites but not only. Their definition of the elite is more complex and longer than that but do not differ as much as their definition of the people: both further agree that the current political regime is problematic, that France is losing over the concept of globalization and the big industries that take the French people's jobs away.

In comparison to what I had expected and formulated in my hypothesis; the analysis revealed some inaccuracies. The subject of Islam was over-represented as expected but especially on the Le Pen's side who made it a major theme of her campaign. Feminism, contrastingly to what I thought, was not a major topic. It was briefly addressed by both here and there, but it was very underwhelming compared to what I was anticipating. Mélenchon did, on multiple occasions, criticize Le Pen but the opposite was not true: she did not even mention him once. They both nevertheless were very critical in regards of Emmanuel Macron and his handling of the presidential position and his governmental decisions.

My last hypothesis was about their common position against their perception of globalization and the European Union and how both would have different remedies to the problems cause by those. That turned out to be true, as developed above in the part with details their polar ideals for France.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn about all of this and it allowed me to reflect deeply on these two politicians but also politics and the state in general. It was a very enriching experience personally and academically. I had no previous experience in discourse analysis at all and that turned out to be a challenge, but I am now familiar with a larger array of topics and I believe I have learned a lot from this, not only theoretically but also in terms of methodology and structure of an academic work.

Nevertheless, there is still so much more to uncover on the topics of populism, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen. The major flaw and limitation of this work is that because of its limited highly specified data, it might be hard to get general conclusions on Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The findings from this analysis may not apply to their discourses in the media or in the previous presidential elections for example.

Even concerning the same data, more could be done. An idea could be to take this research one step deeper and put the discourses through a quantitative analysis to see if the results converge. It would have also been interesting to also study their interactions on televised debates, the content of their conferences, press releases and social media communications to see if there are differences in their discourses. Another concept would have been to study the evolution of their ideas throughout the campaigns. As for populism in general, there is so many other aspects to study, this work was only focused on a discourse analysis using limited qualitative data but working on how populism functions as an elected government would be another promising subject to explore.

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