

# **NEW WAVE OF MAINSTREAM CAMPAIGNING IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES: ADOPTING POPULISM AS AN ELECTORAL STRATEGY**

**By**

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, Eda Canimana, candidate for the MA degree in Political Science, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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## Abstract

In established democratic regimes where populist right-wing parties and actors increase their electoral power and mass mobilization, mainstream political actors are pushed to reconstruct their political positioning and discourse as a response. Recent literature has previously studied it under the literature of mainstream adoption of populism or populist contagion. This thesis contributes to the literature by adopting a constructivist approach to the populist discourse of mainstream politicians by synthesizing Moffitt's (2016) theory of populist style with Wodak's (2009) Discourse-Historical Analysis to unpack the populist style in the presidential campaigns of Joe Biden in 2020 and Emmanuel Macron in 2017. By analyzing a sample of voter mobilization speeches of Biden and Macron, this thesis finds that Biden and Macron displayed similar discursive themes and strategies that comply with Moffitt's criteria of the populist political style. First, Biden and Macron mobilized a Manichean worldview with people-centrist and anti-elitist rhetoric. They appealed to the electorate by constructing the middle class as the pure people and portraying their populist electoral rivals as the devil elite. Second, Biden and Macron constructed a pro-democratic anti-exclusionary narrative of national values and used it to depict their populist right-wing rivals as threats against the country and national values. This thesis concludes that under pushing factors such as an appealing populist candidate in a presidential election and a growing public distrust of centrism in liberal democracies, mainstream centrist politicians may gain electoral benefit by adopting a populist political style against their populist electoral rivals.

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## Introduction

What opportunities and constraints do mainstream politicians face when they fight against a strong populist right-wing rival in a presidential election? When their populist extremist right-wing electoral rivals have a strong electoral base, mass mobilization and fight for the presidential seat, do mainstream politicians feel the need to change their campaigning style and political leadership image? In the face of the rise of populist extremism, do mainstream politicians try to protect or increase their votes by borrowing discursive strategies from their populist extremist rivals? If so, what does it say about the trajectory of political culture and party politics in liberal democracies? These questions can be best examined by a cross-case analysis of the mainstream campaigns in 2017 in France and 2020 in the United States.

Analyzing the electoral discourse of Joe Biden in 2020 and Emmanuel Macron in 2017 sheds light on whether and how mainstream “centrist” politicians embrace populist style in their political discourse in the face of popular and charismatic extremist right-wing actors with strong mobilization skills. Both Biden and Macron constructed their presidential campaigns in the context of public mistrust of mainstream actors, rising affective polarization among society, public questioning of the democratic norms such as pluralism and the rule of law, and the rising trend of personalized leadership both in the U.S. and in France (see Abramowitz and McCoy 2019; Fougère and Barthold 2020). In France, the populist extremist nationalist Front National (*Front Nationale*) leader Marine Le Pen rose to the second round of the 2017 presidential elections by mobilizing a nativist, anti-immigration, and Eurosceptic political program. Meanwhile, Donald Trump had already been subverting the democratic character of the American public sphere by mobilizing the masses towards his polarizing and exclusionary discourse during his presidency between 2016 and 2020. In these contexts, Biden and Macron’s electoral victories over their charismatic populist

rivals are worth examining, given that conventional centrist political discourse is getting more unpopular among societies in Europe and in the United States (Berman 2021) and populist anti-systemic political actors are gaining wider popularity through nativist hatred (Ford and Jennings 2020). Despite these challenging dynamics, Biden and Macron won the presidential elections partly thanks to their effective campaign discourse.

This thesis contributes to the literature on the mainstream adoption of populism by examining this phenomenon under a severe context that puts high pressure on mainstream actors, which can be observed in the 2020 American presidential elections and the 2017 French presidential elections. The presidential elections in 2020 in the United States and 2017 in France had high priority in the worldwide political agenda. These two elections had several similarities, rendering them fruitful for cross-case analysis. First, they had populist extremist right-wing rivals with a strong electoral base and leverage of mass mobilization. Second, these populist extremist political figures had an agenda of pushing the existing liberal democratic system into autocratization, hence the results of these two elections had been regarded extremely critical in terms of the trajectories of these two established democracies. Third, Emmanuel Macron and Joe Biden became the winners of both presidential elections, despite the challenging efforts of their populist rivals to delegitimize them. These characteristics render Biden's 2020 presidential campaign and Macron's 2017 presidential campaign as ideal cases to analyze the extent to which mainstream politicians can stylize their campaign into populism under severe pushing factors posed by the two-horse nature of presidential elections as well as the personalized leadership style of populist radical right-wing electoral candidate. Comparing the similarities and differences between Biden's electoral discourse in 2020 and Macron's electoral discourse in 2017 will shed light on how these two mainstream centrist politicians embraced a populist style in their presidential campaigning, and how they adapted their



campaign style to the dynamics of the political cleavage structure and party system in their own countries.

Populism studies have a rich background in contending theories to understand what populism entails and how populism operates in political discourse. Cas Mudde's (2004) ideational approach is a landmark theoretical contribution to define populism as a "thin-ideology", pushing for a Manichean worldview of the society in two mutually exclusive camps "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite" and a moral prescription for a unified "volonté générale". However, this thesis adopts Moffitt's theory of populism as a political style in conceptualizing the populist styling of Biden and Macron's presidential campaigns. As a complementary to the main tenets of populism formulated by Mudde (2004), Moffitt (2016) defines populism as a political style and argues that it is important to move beyond the ideological contents of populist discourse and to pay equal attention to populism's performative aspects, especially for the fact that media has an indispensable role in contemporary politics. As an overarching political style that comprises the elements of ideology, discourse, and political strategy that populist actors use, Moffitt (2016) defines three features of a populist style, which are an appeal to a unified category of "the people", invoking the public with a perception of "threat" and behaving unprofessionally in public.

This thesis aims to contribute to comparative empirical research on populist politics and mainstream reaction to populism in liberal democracies by adopting a constructivist approach to populist discourse adopted by mainstream actors. I argue that Moffitt's (2016) approach to populism is beneficial to analyzing the elements of a populist style in the electoral discourse of Biden and Macron's presidential campaigns because Moffitt's approach enables one to deconstruct the populist elements in mainstream campaigns even though their ideological programs are not anti-pluralist or extremist. In addition, Moffitt's definition of populism enables one to contextualize

the populist aspects of the discursive strategies of Biden and Macron's presidential campaigns. Suitable for the theoretical approach of this thesis, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology (Wodak and Meyer 2009) helps unpack the populist elements of Biden and Macron's discursive strategies in their presidential campaigns. In order to analyze the discursive strategies that Biden and Macron used in their voter mobilization speeches, this thesis used the guidelines of the Discourse-Historical Approach, a method of CDA developed by Wodak (2009) to unpack the discursive strategies of political speeches.

The analytical part of this thesis will demonstrate that Biden and Macron used populist style in Moffitt's sense significantly in their presidential campaigns while competing against their populist extremist rivals Trump and Le Pen. Biden and Macron mobilized a Manichean worldview of society in which they ascribed the category of the pure people to the middle class while ascribing the category of the devil elite to their populist right-wing rivals. Their electoral discourse was predominantly based on their frequent portrayal of their populist radical right-wing electoral rivals as corrupt elite threatening national values and middle-class society. This was in response to Trump and Le Pen's charismatic leadership and attempt to subvert the democratic norms and institutions in their countries. Both Biden and Macron constructed a charismatic leadership image for themselves while claiming to be the true representative of the people's interests. Moreover, both Biden and Macron frequently developed a "national values" narrative as an alternative to the exclusionary narrative of their populist extremist rivals. While they frequently argued that the pure middle-class people were the real representative of the national values, they argued that their populist rivals were the enemies of the national values. In addition to these similarities, there are several different nuances between Biden's populist style and Macron's populist style in their presidential campaigns. While Biden frequently portrayed Trump as a corrupt elite estranged from

the circumstances of the pure people, Macron frequently blamed the established French parties having been in power for over thirty years for being estranged from the pure people and causing its populist extremist rival Marine Le Pen to emerge as a danger to the national values.

The thesis will begin with an overview of the theoretical debates on populism and continue with a comparative evaluation of a sample of empirical research on the mainstream adoption of populism. It will proceed with the theoretical framework based on the approach of populism as a political style. After elaborating on the methodological approach in detail in the second chapter, the thesis will proceed with the analysis of the electoral discourse of Emmanuel Macron during the 2017 French presidential campaign and Joe Biden during the 2020 United States presidential campaign in terms of two aspects: 1) how they appealed to their audience and constructed a charismatic leadership image and 2) how they invoked a public sense of “national crisis” and constructed a narrative of “national wisdom”.

## **Limitations**

This thesis presents a preliminary cross-case study of the populist stylization of mainstream electoral campaigning, aiming at hypothesis-building research. The 2017 French presidential elections and the 2020 United States presidential elections are typical cases of liberal democracy in which mainstream politicians compete with populist extremist right-wing in presidential elections. Both countries have similar forms of government: the United States with a presidential system, and France with a semi-presidential system. However, while the United States has a two-party system, France has a multiparty system. Despite this difference, the U.S. and France share similar scope conditions in terms of their aforementioned substantive bounds, which are 1) liberal democratic regime, 2) presidential system, and 3) radical right-wing populism in presidential

rivalry. This makes Biden and Macron's presidential campaigns ideal cases to study the main hypothesis of this thesis.

However, this thesis does not claim any causal mechanism between the populist styling of mainstream campaigning and winning elections against populist extremists in presidential elections nor does it claim generalizability for its hypothesis to work on other cases. Rather, it is a descriptive study of Biden and Macron's presidential campaigns specifically, aiming to illustrate the correlation between pushing factors of presidential rivalry with a popular populist actor and the populist styling of a mainstream campaign and electoral victory. This research only examines two typical cases of Biden and Macron's campaigns closely to build the main hypothesis, which can be later tested and modified by other further studies by examining different cases.

# Chapter 1: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

## 1.1 An Overview of Theoretical and Empirical Studies on Populism

### 1.1.1 The Ideational Approach to Populism and Its Discontents

The prominent approach to populism is Cas Mudde's ideational approach, which defines populism as a "thin-ideology" that depicts society as separated between two antagonistic camps, which are "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite" and pushes for a moral prescription that a legitimate politics should result in the general will of "the pure people" (2004, 543). According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), populism as a "thin-ideology" is different from but accompanied by a host "full-ideology" that has a well-articulated political program, which might range from nativism to socialism. Populism presents a normative worldview (Mudde 2004, 544) and a limited and simplistic programmatic scope (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 6). As the first core element of populism, "the pure people" is a vague category, exclusionary, and open to populists' maneuvers, as nobody knows which part of the society can be excluded from the title of "pure people" (Mudde, 2004, 546). The second core element of populism is anti-elitism. Similarly, the category of "the devil elite" is also vague, but specifically refers to those holding power in culture, economy, and politics (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 12). The third core element of populism is the moral rhetoric to insist that politics should be the "volonté general" of the homogenous people. Populists claim to be "the authentic leader of the silent majority" aiming for the power to implement the "volonté générale" and to save the "volonté générale" from the devil elite. The ideational approach to populism defines two opposite poles of populism, which are elitism and pluralism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017).

The ideational approach helps to detect the core ideological elements of populism in empirical research and distinguish them from other ideological components of its accompanying "thick-

ideology” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 19; Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017). It presents a complete analytical framework to understand how the core elements of populism, namely, people-centrism with anti-elitism and moral prescription for a homogenous “*volonté générale*”, connect to the facilitating elements of populism such as charismatic leadership (Mudde 2004, 545) or anti-establishment, which is the manifestation of anti-elitism in Western countries (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 17-19). Mudde’s ideational approach is a landmark step in theorizing on the populist set of ideas and conducting comparative and empirical research on populist actors as well as in analyzing the evolution of populist politics across countries and geopolitical regions (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017). However, the consensus among comparative empirical researchers who adopt the ideational approach is not strong enough when it comes to operationalizing populism. For instance, Lindsay and Galan (2021) conducted a discourse analysis with holistic grading of Joe Biden’s speeches in the 2020 presidential campaign to find out if Biden was a populist. They operationalized populism as anti-pluralism and anti-elitism, and their results were that Biden was not populist at all, even though Biden has used people-centric language and has attacked Trump for being part of the elite, because of Biden’s pluralist approach to the people and hesitation to attack the elite in general. Similarly, Manucci and Weber (2017) adopted the ideational approach and conducted a multi-level content analysis of newspapers and election manifestos to find out if populism has been gaining prominence in several Western countries from the 1970s to the 2010s. However, unlike Lindsay and Galan (2021), Manucci and Weber (2017) operationalized populist content as primarily people-centrist while keeping anti-elitism as a secondary quality. While Lindsay and Galan (2021) took populism as a matter of kind and the political actor as the unit of analysis, Manucci and Weber (2017) took populism as a matter of degree and political content as the unit of analysis. As can be seen, despite its seminal framework on what populism entails, the

ideational approach did not suffice to end contradictions among comparative researchers in defining and operationalizing populist discourse.

Being critical of defining populism as ideology, Bonikowski (2016, 13) argues that the ideational approach tends to overlook the dynamic nature of populism, as populism can be employed by all political actors (mainstream or not) selectively in different degrees in different political circumstances. As opposed to the ideational approach taking the political actor as the unit of analysis, Bonikowski argues that populism is a strategic discursive frame, which can be employed to present any issue most effectively to address the audience's circumstances. To support his argument, Bonikowski (2016, 15) points out that political outsiders use populism more frequently as an electoral strategy, most commonly with an anti-establishment stance, but when they become incumbent or elected in legislative elections, they tend to tone down their populist frame. As a result, he urges that the unit of analysis in studying populism should be the discourse of the political actors, rather than the political actors themselves (Bonikowski 2016, 14). This criticism of the ideational approach sheds light on the question of vagueness in defining populism as an ideology, which ultimately results in problems of replicability and generalizability in empirical research. For example, as will be elaborated in the next section, there is a tendency to compare populism as a “thin-ideology” in the same unit of analysis with different elements of “thick-ideology” in the research on the mainstream adoption of populism (see Roodujin 2013; Schwörer 2021), causing problems of replicability, and hence, generalizability. However, despite the strength of his criticism of the ideational approach, Bonikowski does not provide concrete elements of populism as a discursive strategy beyond what Mudde’s (2004) ideational approach has already provided, namely, the Manichean worldview of the antagonism between “the pure people” and “the devil elite” and the notion of a unified “*volonté générale*”.

### 1.1.2 Previous Research on Mainstream Adoption of Populism

Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2017) formulation of populism as a set of ideas has been employed by many researchers to conduct discourse analysis or content analysis to test whether a given political actor is populist or not (Schwörer 2021; Lindsay and Galan 2021; Roodujin 2013). Such case studies take the ideational definition as the benchmark to operationalize populist discourse, but they end up with competing results. They are important to cite, as they contribute to the methodological expertise on how populism operates and transforms the political landscape across time and space. However, it is equally important to deconstruct their conceptualization and theorization of populism in addition to the differences among their research strategies.

The thesis of populist contagion is a newly emerging field of research in populism studies. Building on Mudde and Kaltwasser's ideational approach, Roodujin (2013) defines populism as a "set of ideas" with core elements of anti-elitism and people-centrism, and investigates whether the electoral success of an alleged populist party pushed for the diffusion of populism in public opinion, mass media, and other mainstream political parties across West European countries. He conceptualizes this as "the spiral of populism" in which the media populism (see Mazzoleni 2008), the popular dissatisfaction in mainstream centrist parties, and the greater visibility and prominence of populist parties hypothetically nourish each other (Roodujin 2013). Adopting the ideational approach similar to Roodujin (2013), Schwörer (2021) takes people-centrism and anti-elitism as the core discursive elements of populism. Similar to Roodujin (2013), Schwörer (2021) looked at the concept of "populist contagion", but unlike Roodujin (2013), he works on this concept only at the level of mainstream parties' electoral manifestos. Schwörer (2021) investigates the contents and degrees of populist, nativist, and leftist messages within mainstream parties' discourse under



external pressures such as the rise of populist right-wing parties in elections and the prominence of anti-elitism and nativism in public opinion.

Even though Roodujin (2013) and Schwörer (2021) have the same conceptualization of populism and similar research agendas, their research results are contending. Roodujin (2013) analyzes a multitude of Western countries consisting of cases that contain an electorally successful populist party and those that do not. Through a longitudinal analysis of a sample of the election manifestos of mainstream parties and opinion articles published during election periods in these countries, he finds out that even though the media and voters of populist parties became more populist when populist parties gained electoral success, mainstream parties did not become populist. Moreover, his findings show that established populists decreased their tone of populism after achieving electoral success. However, Schwörer (2021) presents a longitudinal analysis of the election manifestos and party statements of center-right, center-left, and populist parties in four Western countries between 2008 and 2015 when both populist left-wing and populist right-wing parties were on the rise in elections. Ultimately, Schwörer (2021) finds that populist parties' electoral breakthrough and the public opinion shift towards issues raised by the respective populist party correlate significantly with the mainstream parties' adoption of the issues and discursive content raised by populists attaining electoral success. With regards to the debates on whether "the populist contagion" of mainstream politics is a danger against liberal democracy, Schwörer (2021) reveals that the discursive elements of anti-pluralism and illiberalism channel into mainstream parties' discourse through nativism rather than populism when the pressure of established populist actors' electoral success increases.

The difference between the results of Roodujin (2013) and Schwörer (2021) on the hypothesis of "populist contagion" is puzzling, because it raises questions of replicability and generalizability in

operationalizing populism as a set of ideas in content analysis. Both researchers adhere to content analysis of electoral manifestos of mainstream parties in similar scope conditions, but they reached different results. I argue that operationalizing and measuring populism around people-centrism and anti-elitism in electoral manifestos via content analysis does not wholly capture the specific nuances and performative characteristics of populism that take different shapes in different political circumstances.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework of This Thesis**

Mudde's ideational approach to populism helps to study the core elements of populist politics taking different shapes in different geopolitical contexts. However, I argue that context-based specificities of populist politics in Western Europe can be better understood if one supports Mudde's seminal and overarching theory with other theories of populism that consider the dynamics that shape political representation, political communication, and public opinion. This is particularly important while operationalizing populist discourse in comparative empirical research, especially given that these forces shape populist politics and mainstream reaction to populist politics.

I argue that media populism and personalization of political leadership are indispensable parts of the locomotive forces that shape the political logic in the Western context, affecting the politics of populist extremists and mainstream centrists. Media is a prominent venue where populism enlarges its political space and increases its political capital (Mazzoleni 2008). Commercialization of media motivates media outlets to be more concerned about ratings and sensationalism, which Mazzoleni (2008) calls "media populism". According to Mazzoleni (2008), media populism further contributes to political outsiders as it gives more space to populist leaders who gain more visibility and more opportunity to mobilize the masses for more sensational issues. Apart from the aspect of

media, the rise of populism has a close relationship with the prominence of the personality of populist leaders. Charismatic leadership is not exclusive to populism but is a device of populist politics independent of its ideological content (Mudde 2004, 545). Moreover, it also emerges as a political capital to be utilized by politicians regardless of whether they are extremists or mainstream. Referring to the historical examples of presidential campaigns in the United States, Rolfe (2016) aptly reveals that American voters focus more on politicians' image such as being trustworthy, and it determines the extent of public legitimacy for politicians to claim and get into power. In addition, both mainstream and populist, politicians have usually used the anti-politics rhetoric of "restoring democracy" by claiming to be "the only sincere and good politician who will look after public interest" (Rolfe 2016).

The transformation of the axis of political competition in Western politics accompanies the prominence of media populism and the personalization of political leadership. Technocracy and populism can fusion in today's highly mediatized politics and personalized political leadership. Bickerton and Accetti (2021) subtly analyze technopopulism as a historically specific political logic in the contemporary Euro-American context. The broad socio-economic transformation brought a gap between the party structure change and the societal change, leading to the demise of the predominance of ideology in societal cleavage structure and party competition (Bickerton and Accetti 2021; Ford and Jennings 2020). Moving from this, Bickerton and Accetti (2021) propose that the contemporary political logic is technopopulism, which is driven by the axis of populism and technocracy as two modes of political action, while ideological differences between parties in competition lost significance in gaining electoral appeal. As an organizing logic of political competition, populism pushes technocrats, whether moderate or extreme, to promote themselves as the "real capable politician to implement what the people want" in addition to their claim of

expertise in political matters (Bickerton and Accetti 2021). Mainstream “insider” politicians have been engaging in populist discourse occasionally throughout history (Bonikowski 2016; Mudde 2004, 551). Populism is a political tool for insider and outsider politicians to mobilize the masses around a Manichean worldview.

Considering all aforementioned dynamics, populism can be regarded as a political logic in Laclau’s sense (2005) setting incentives and constraints for political actors. Marked by media populism and personalization of political leadership, the prominent role of populist politics in the overarching political logic significantly transforms how mainstream and non-mainstream politicians construct their political discourse and performance. More specifically, populist politics shape how politicians (whether mainstream or not) construct their internal antagonistic frontiers in Laclau’s (2005) terms, namely how they construct the category of “the pure people” and that of “the devil elite”. Hence, this thesis moves from the question of whether and how mainstream centrist politicians fall into the populist political logic with their political discourse and performance.

### **1.2.1 Populism as Political Style**

I argue that the theory of populism as a political style captures well the changing dynamics of the political logic in Western Europe and how it shapes the ways in which established populist actors and mainstream actors communicate with voters, frame issues and shape political agenda. The theory of populism as a political style (Canovan 1999; Moffitt 2016) moves from the approach that political discourse is constructed by overarching power relations, which shape the political landscape, and hence, the contours of who can perform political discourse, how and in which venues. Whether established populist outsiders or mainstream centrists, political actors construct their political communication strategies within the contours of overarching political logic. Populist style of politics is a prominent way of producing political discourse and image in the Western

political landscape. It affects not only how established populist actors construct their Manichean worldview but also how mainstream centrist actors develop their political discourse and image as a response. Hence, I argue that a constructivist approach to populist political style helps analyze the presidential campaigns of Joe Biden in 2020 and Emmanuel Macron in 2017 with a different lens to see how they developed their campaign discourse as a response to their established populist rivals who had strong public appeal and charismatic image.

Canovan (1999) aptly maps facilitating elements of populism such as charismatic leadership and simplistic communication style in connection to populism's core elements, namely, anti-elitism, people-centrism, and a notion of homogenous "*volonté générale*". Ultimately, she puts populism into the question of political power structures and argues that as populism contains an inherent reaction against power, it cannot be thought of without the political regime it emerges against. Canovan (1999) sees the vagueness of the categories of the pure people and the devil elite as the product of populism's innate reaction to the political regime, taking different forms depending on the regime itself. For instance, populist actors can advocate for economic nationalism in free market regimes, or for free market in welfare regimes (Canovan 1999, 4). As a result, Canovan (1999) defines populism as an "appeal", claiming legitimacy to speak for the people, and pushing for a notion of "united people with grievances" against "the devil elite" in power. According to such a theoretical framework, charismatic leadership is a result of the populist style of politics, because populist actors capitalize on the popular distrust of the political establishment and claim that the grievances of the common people have simple solutions. In other words, populist actors make use of simplistic language and direct communication while addressing their electorate as the audience. This enables them to build an emotional link with their voters, leading to a personalized style of leadership claiming democratic legitimacy (Canovan 1999, 5-6).

Canovan's theory of populism as a political style offers a fruitful framework to see how populist politics make use of rhetoric and leadership image following the regime dynamics and how populist politics emerges, takes shape within, and transforms the political power structures. However, Canovan's analysis of populist politics does not provide specific criteria to determine the core elements and the scope of populist political style as opposed to Mudde's (2004) ideational definition, which is an important shortcoming that prevents Canovan's theory from being used and replicated in comparative empirical research. Moffitt's (2016) theory of populism as a political style fills this gap by determining specific core elements to define the characteristics and scope of populism by incorporating the strengths of both the ideational approach and Canovan's theory of populism as a political style.

Building on a focus on power relations that shape media, political discourse, and party politics, Moffitt (2016) defines populism as a political style similar to Canovan (1999). Defining populism as *"repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life"* (Moffitt 2016, 37), Moffitt (2016) defines three main features of populist style, which are appeal to the category of "the pure people", invoking a public sense of "crisis" and unconventional manners in the public sphere. Moffitt's theory of populism as a political style incorporates not only political discourse but also acts and manners in public settings situated in overarching power dynamics that set constraints and incentives for politicians to connect with voters in certain ways. In that sense, Moffitt's theory of populism provides a useful guideline to conduct empirical studies on instances of populist appeal utilized by many political actors regardless of their ideological program without overlooking the power dynamics that incentivize and shape adherence to populist style in different ways.

Moffitt builds on an understanding of political style as a mediated channel between politicians and the public, the former utilizing style to construct complex reality, and the public receiving the style to make sense of such reality. Moffitt's (2016) three aforementioned stylistic features help populist politicians mobilize people against their political rivals whom they define as the devil elite while portraying themselves as the authentic representative of the pure people who would save the people from the dangers of the devil elite. Moffitt's conception of political style is not restricted to discourse but includes the rhetorical, aesthetic, and performative aspects of political communication (Moffitt 2016, 46). This implies that what makes a political act or discourse populist is not particularly its ideological content, but beyond that, its style, which comprises not only discourse but also performance. The notion of populism as a political style opens a way to consider the power dynamics that construct political performances (Moffitt 2016, 47). Moffitt (2016) argues that such a definition of populism incorporates Mudde's ideational populism as "thin-ideology" as well as other scholars' definition of populism as a degree (see Bonikowski 2016) because taking populism as a style acknowledges the fact that mainstream politicians can utilize populism in different degrees in different times while building on the core ideological tenets of populism as put by Mudde (2004).

## Chapter 2: Research Design

### 2.1 Discourse-Historical Analysis

This thesis presents a critical discourse analysis of the presidential campaign speeches of Joe Biden in the 2020 American presidential elections and Emmanuel Macron in the 2017 French presidential elections. As this thesis employs a constructivist approach to populism and political discourse, it adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The CDA approach unpacks the power relations that political discourse reveals, deconstructs, and reconstructs in various fields of social action based on specific socio-political and historical contexts. Mainstream presidential campaigns are important fields of social action to observe their discourse under pushing factors in contemporary political and media landscapes in liberal democracies. CDA helps deconstruct the populist elements of Biden and Macron's discursive strategies in mainstream presidential campaigns. It also aligns with this thesis' theoretical approach to populist discourse as this thesis employs Moffitt's (2016) theory of populism as a political style.

As a method of CDA, Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA) will help trace how the presidential campaign discourses of Biden and Macron took shape during their campaign periods. DHA defines discourse as a phenomenon, which is socially and historically constituted by and constitutive of ideology, political power, and the political environment (Wodak and Meyer 2009). DHA handles discourse in a comprehensive way, which includes texts, speeches, arguments, and interactions. It deals with the particular social and political context as well as the discursive content of its unit of analysis. In addition, it pays special attention to the political context of the time in which the narrator performs, given that it situates the discourse of its unit of analysis within broader power relations and political context. Hence, DHA pays special attention to the discursive strategies that a narrator employs in order to reach a certain social or political goal. Such perspective helps



contextualize and historicize the presidential campaign discourse of Biden and Macron while competing against their populist right-wing rivals who had already transformed both the political agenda and the public sphere with their polarizing and exclusionary discourse.

DHA analyzes discursive strategies in terms of how the narrator discursively constructs the objects and the people, from which perspective he or she produces his or her discourse, how he or she justifies his or her discourse, and how he or she intensifies or mitigates the discourse that emerges out of his or her narration. Reisigl and Wodak (2016) provide a substantial methodological guideline to analyze discursive strategies in Table 1:

*Table 1: The list of discursive strategies for DHA (Reisigl and Wodak 2016)*

<b>Discursive strategies</b>	<b>Description</b>
Referential (nomination) strategy	How objects/persons/events are named
Predication (attribution) strategy	How objects/persons/events are qualified (positively or negatively)
Argumentation strategy	How statements are justified or questioned
Perspectivization strategy	The perspective from which the speaker talks
Strategy of intensification or mitigation (deontic/epistemic)	How the speaker modifies the illocutionary force of his/her statements

## 2.2 Research Strategy

This thesis analyzes Joe Biden’s discursive strategies in his 2020 presidential campaign and Emmanuel Macron’s discursive strategies in his 2017 presidential campaign comparatively. The transcripts of Biden’s voter mobilization speeches are from the website [www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com), a U.S.-based professional transcribing website providing the public speeches of American politicians. Emmanuel Macron’s electoral campaign speech transcripts are available on his party's official website “République En Marche!.” This thesis focuses on their voter mobilization speeches particularly rather than presidential debates because voter mobilization speeches show how politicians directly address the voters. Hence, they present appropriate data to examine the elements of populist style in Biden and Macron’s campaigns while mobilizing the electorate against their populist right-wing rivals, which is the main problem of this thesis.

To address the features of the electoral systems in the United States and France, I constructed my samples of transcripts from Biden and Macron differently. In the United States, presidential primary elections known as “Super Tuesday” are important for politicians to become presidential candidates in their own parties. Voters vote in each state for the delegates from the Democratic and Republican parties so that these delegates vote for the presidential candidates in the National Conventions of their parties. I analyzed Joe Biden’s Super Tuesday speech, which was held on March 3, 2020, in Los Angeles, California, and his speech to the Democratic National Convention, which was held on August 20, 2020, in Wilmington, Delaware. Also, I analyzed Biden’s 2020 voter mobilization speeches in Philadelphia on November 1, Gettysburg on October 7, Pittsburgh on August 31, Georgia on October 27, Wisconsin on October 30, and Pennsylvania on November 2.

As opposed to the U.S., France has two rounds of presidential elections. For Emmanuel Macron’s campaign in the 2017 French presidential elections, I analyzed his declaration of presidential

candidacy speech in Bobigny on November 16, 2016, and his speeches at Lyon, Toulon, Marseille, and Dijon that he delivered before the first round on April 23, 2017. In addition, I included his victory speech on April 23, 2017, in the Versailles Gate after he became the winner of the first round of the presidential election along with the Front National candidate Marine Le Pen, who came up as the second. Macron delivered various electoral speeches while running along with Le Pen between April 23 and May 7 in the second round of the 2017 presidential elections. I analyzed his electoral speech on May 1 for Labor Day.

## **Chapter 3: Appeal to the People and Charismatic Leadership**

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the discursive strategies through which Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron appealed to their electorate during their presidential campaigns. Analyzing their voter mobilization speeches, this thesis reveals that both Biden and Macron constructed a category of the pure people, and they utilized their pro-middle-class stance as a tool to appeal to the electorate and to build a charismatic leadership image. In addition, both Biden and Macron portrayed their electoral rivals as the devil elite estranged from the pure people. However, the discourse analysis equally reveals that while Biden utilized the rhetoric of anti-elitism to attack predominantly Donald Trump, Macron's anti-elitist rhetoric was directed towards the mainstream parties in general.

### **3.1. Joe Biden's 2020 Presidential Campaign**

Joe Biden used his voter mobilization speeches to depict himself as a pro-middle-class politician and his incumbent rival Trump as an elite who is estranged from the realities of the middle and the working class. He frequently referred to his childhood and family memories to show his middle-class background. In addition, he used slogans repetitively such as “Wall Street did not build this country. You built this country. The middle class built this country” or “The Americans won’t give up, unlike Donald Trump.” In most of his voter mobilization speeches, these slogans facilitated his Manichean worldview of the society in which he constructed the category of the pure American people in juxtaposition with the devil elite Trump. His pro-middle-class discourse and depiction of his rival Trump as an estranged elite constituted a significant part of Biden’s campaign style in his voter mobilization speeches. In addition, Biden built a charismatic leadership image by presenting himself as a politician with a middle-class background who can understand the resentments of the

middle and working class caused by Trump and who can become the representative of their interests and wishes in power.

In his voter mobilization speeches, Joe Biden frequently used various discursive strategies to show his close involvement with the middle class. One important strategy was to construct his image as a middle-class politician by telling stories about his childhood memories, such as his elementary school memories of being bullied by his friends when he was stuttering (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020), or his family memories of changing his home when his father lost his job or found a new job (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Beaver County, Pennsylvania November 2 2020; Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020). Biden's frequent usage of these anecdotes helped him to portray himself as a middle-class politician who had experienced being oppressed and disadvantaged.

While speaking about the country's economic issues, Biden supported his image of a "middle-class politician" by quoting his father saying "You know Joey, a job's a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about your place in the community." (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020) In his voter mobilization speech in Pennsylvania, Biden frequently mentioned that workers and trade union members have endorsed him since his long-term political career began. In this speech event, he frequently mentioned that his hometown was Scranton, which is a working-class city, he witnessed the lives of ironworkers when he was a child in Scranton, and when his family settled down in Claymont, Delaware after his father lost his job, he saw that there had been many steelworkers (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Beaver County, Pennsylvania November 2 2020). His anecdotes of working-class family background helped him intensify his pro-middle-class political image and his claim to know what middle-class Americans need and want.

Biden's other discursive strategy to appeal to the people was to construct a homogeneous entity of the pure people as the middle and working class that Trump had forgotten at the expense of his own interests. He frequently argued that the middle and working-class people had an ultimate interest: to get rid of Trump and restructure the economy to prioritize the middle class (Super Tuesday Speech Transcripts: Biden, Sanders, Warren, Bloomberg Speeches to Supporters 2020). He facilitated such an argument with the slogan "Wall Street did not build America, the middle class did, and unions built the middle class" (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Beaver County, Pennsylvania November 2 2020). In his Super Tuesday speech, he referred to the people as "the ironworkers, the steelworkers, the boilermakers, the plumbers, they are the ones who have been forgotten by Trump" (Super Tuesday Speech Transcripts: Biden, Sanders, Warren, Bloomberg Speeches to Supporters 2020). He even made an overt anti-elitist remark by saying "Folks, the people who built this country weren't Wall Street, and investment bankers, and CEOs, they were hard-working Americans, middle-class folks, working-class folks, who built the middle class, and unions built the middle class" (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020).

In his presidential campaign discourse, Biden constructed his political image and that of Trump in connection to each other. While constructing himself as a politician with a middle-class background who has been witnessing and working closely on the issues of middle-class Americans, he spent significant parts of his speeches depicting Trump as an elite politician who relentlessly left the Americans into a national crisis and refused to understand the circumstances of the middle class. The use of analogies and slogans was a prominent strategy that Biden adopted in constructing the political image of Trump in juxtaposition to himself. As an example, in his Pennsylvania speech, Biden called his childhood stories in the working-class city of Scranton "the lesson" that he never forgot, but Trump never understood. He simplified and intensified his contrasting depiction of

himself and Trump with analogies that address socio-economic inequalities and cleavages, such as “I see the world from Scranton. I see this world from working class towns all around this state” and “Donald Trump can only see the world from Park Avenue. He can’t see what families like yours and mine have gone through” (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Beaver County, Pennsylvania November 2 2020). As another example, on the COVID-19 pandemic, Biden referred to Trump’s response “We will learn to live with the virus” and depicted Trump as an “irresponsible” president “who does not get out of his golf bunker” (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020). This helped him to condemn Trump who had an elite life and was estranged from the people’s miseries and demands during times of national crisis.

Biden spoke elaborately about salient issues from the middle-class perspective, and he produced effective slogans to simplify and intensify his pro-middle-class image while painting Trump as an elite. Biden’s overt defense of unionization rights in his Philadelphia speech is an example of this (Joe Biden Campaign Event Speech Transcript Philadelphia November 1 2020). In his speech in Pennsylvania, he said “I know how to say union”, implying that all politicians hesitated to defend the unionization rights of the middle and working class, but he knew how to advocate for the interests of the middle and working class, because not only he is brave, but also he is competent thanks to his experiences in working with unions (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Beaver County, Pennsylvania November 2 2020). As another example, in his other voter mobilization speeches, he frequently criticized Trump’s tax giveaway policy resulting in the wealthiest companies and people not paying tax. He argued that those companies and people made loads of money and were exempt from tax obligations as opposed to the middle-class workers who had been unjustly obliged to make more tax payments. Biden used this as evidence of his argument that Trump was seeking the interests of the financial elite. He argued that these taxes could have gone to equip the schools and

hospitals during the pandemic to help overcome the economic loss, instead of Trump's choice of repealing tax obligation for the wealthiest class (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020). Another way in which Biden described Trump as a self-interested elite politician was his criticism of Trump's healthcare policy. Trump's healthcare policy aimed at repealing the Affordable Care Act. Biden criticized it elaborately by arguing that Trump saw healthcare as a privilege, as opposed to himself seeing healthcare as a right for the middle class.

Biden's style of criticism against Trump's policy choices helped him to paint Donald Trump as a devil elite politician taking care of the interests of the upper-class minority at the expense of the middle-class and working-class majority. He used his slogan "Wall Street did not build this country. You built this country. The middle class built this country, and the unions built the middle class" in his multiple voter mobilization speeches (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Beaver County, Pennsylvania November 2 2020; Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020; Super Tuesday Speech Transcripts: Biden, Sanders, Warren, Bloomberg Speeches to Supporters 2020) In his Super Tuesday speech, he added to this slogan "I am coming, and you are not going anywhere" (Super Tuesday Speech Transcripts: Biden, Sanders, Warren, Bloomberg Speeches to Supporters 2020). This slogan has several rhetorical functions. First, it implies that the incumbent Trump followed the interests of the financial elite at the expense of the middle-class majority. Second, it implied that Trump was an enemy of the middle class who had been forgotten. Third, it implied that Joe Biden claimed to be the savior of the middle class while "packing out" Trump (Super Tuesday Speech Transcripts: Biden, Sanders, Warren, Bloomberg Speeches to Supporters 2020). The overarching discourse in these quotes as mentioned above shows that he attributed himself with a charismatic leadership image, whereas he positioned Trump



as a danger to the country with his hate speeches, careless reactions to the national crisis issues, and self-interested rich politician whose policy choices benefitted only his upper class.

As can be seen, while Biden built his political image by frequently highlighting his middle-class background, he constructed a category of “the pure people” by referring to the middle and working class and juxtaposing it with a category of the devil elite. In addition, while calling for prioritizing the interests of the middle and working-class, he ascribed it to a notion of unified national interest by frequently saying “Wall Street did not build America, the middle class did”. Biden’s people-centric discourse created an antagonism between the category of the unified pure people and Trump whom he associated with the devil elite. Such discursive strategies echo Moffitt’s (2016) criterion of populist style, which is a populist way to appeal to the people versus the elite. Moreover, with repetitive use of slogans, Biden simplified and intensified his people-centric and anti-elitist rhetoric to mobilize a Manichean worldview among voters. Echoing Canovan’s point of simplification and direct messaging as a strategy to mobilize against political power (1999, 4-5), Biden used Trump’s incumbency period between 2016 and 2020 as a reference to associate middle-class resentments with his portrayal of Trump as a devil elite.

Another discursive strategy of Biden to show Trump as a “devil elite” was to invoke a public sense of danger to the democratic character of the political regime. In his Philadelphia speech, Biden argued that the incumbent Trump was trying to suppress the voter turnout. He argued that Trump prevented voters from going to the ballot box out of fear of losing elections, and in doing so, Trump did not hesitate to violate voting rights (Joe Biden Campaign Event Speech Transcript Philadelphia November 1 2020). This argument functioned to invoke a public sense of duty to vote for Biden for the sake of civil rights. Biden made further use of this argument by adding that under Trump’s incumbency, the democratic character of the political regime was in danger. Biden’s words “It’s

been unlike any other campaign in history. We have to earn our democracy. We have to get out and vote. Freedom is not a state, freedom is an act” are illustrative of such invocation of crisis as a way to mobilize votes (Biden, Joe Biden Campaign Event Speech Transcript Philadelphia November 1 2020). In his voter mobilization speech in Atlanta, Georgia, he defined voting for him in the presidential elections as “keeping a sense of empowerment”, implying that he would be the savior leader of the Americans as a president, protecting democracy from his rival Trump (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Atlanta, Georgia October 27 2020). He further said “I think we are going to surprise the living devil out of everybody this year” in the Atlanta speech, implying Trump (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Atlanta, Georgia October 27 2020).

In Biden’s voter mobilization speeches, the predominance of his adversarial strategies against Trump is a product of the contemporary political culture in the United States. In the context of the United States, the rise of affective polarization and negative partisanship are seen as more determinative in voter mobilization and electoral decisions (Garzia and Silva 2022; Abramowitz and McCoy 2019). In such context, Biden’s investment in his portrayal of Trump as a devil elite in a Manichean worldview effectively helped him invoke people and win the presidential elections. However, it should be equally noted that Biden did not make any exclusion in defining the boundaries of the pure people, excluding his notion of the devil elite, which he attributed primarily to his presidential rival Donald Trump. In defining the contours of “the pure people”, Biden adopted an inclusionary and uniting stance by arguing that the Americans had the concerns and interests of the middle and working class.

### **3.2 Emmanuel Macron’s 2017 Presidential Campaign**

During the 2017 French presidential elections, Emmanuel Macron began his voter mobilization speeches frequently by highlighting his argument that the existing political system in France was

unresponsive to the needs and demands of the people. While depicting the mainstream major parties as obstacles to addressing the people's demands and the global transformation led by digitalization, globalization, and the rise of environmentalism, Macron presented his political program as a profound transformation. In addition, he built a charismatic leadership image by painting himself as an undeterred politician willing to implement what the people wanted despite the major parties and the political system as a whole. As will be seen in detail in the following paragraphs, Macron attacked his electoral rivals by constructing them as the devil elite and developing an anti-establishment stance. Moreover, his discursive strategies to appeal to his electorate constructed a Manichean worldview in which the pure people have a *volonté générale* in favor of the profound change, and in juxtaposition with it, the existing French political system is stuck with the bureaucracy and the mainstream major parties that are unresponsive to the *volonté générale*.

To attack his electoral rivals in his presidential campaign in 2017, Macron focused on discrediting the mainstream major parties, namely the two main party blocs dominated by the Socialist Party and the Conservative Party having been alternately elected for the presidential office for thirty years. He portrayed them as incapable, conformist, stuck with their own power struggles, and estranged from the people and the realities of global transformation. Frequently referring to the global prominence of digitalization and environmental transition, Macron argued that France was going through a critical turning point, and profound reforms were needed, but the established major parties were away from realizing these because they were estranged from the circumstances and the virtue of the ordinary people. In his speech where he declared his presidential candidacy officially on November 16, 2016, Macron said "The others are wrong. Their prescriptions are wrong. But our country is not wrong. They are aware of it, and it is there where a divorce between our country and its political class occurs" (*Annonce de candidature à l'élection présidentielle de*

2017 2016). In his speech at Marseille, he repeated this argumentation by saying “The reasons for the divorce between our country and its political class are the estrangement of the political class, the fact that certain ones are too much worried about power” (Rassemblement à Marseille - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron 2017).

Macron used his negative attribution strategies to discredit the existing French political system as a whole, and at the same time, he frequently used anti-establishment rhetoric. Macron overtly blamed the political establishment and the mainstream major parties for societal issues such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and climate crisis. He described the French political system as “a system of clans” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron de Dijon 2017), as “an enclosed circuit” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Toulon 2017), and as “a clique of inefficacy” (Rassemblement à Marseille - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron 2017). These are the three examples of the ways in which Macron built up a peculiar discourse of anti-establishment in which he portrayed the mainstream major parties as the actors of an enclosed system estranged from the people and hence, posing an obstacle against the implementation of the “volonté générale”. The political establishment that Macron pictured in most of his speeches was predominantly adversarial against the French people. He argued that the long-standing regulations, codes of conduct, and laws posed obstacles, and the major parties who had turned into a political class had been estranged from the people’s daily lives and concerns. At the same time, he used his former posts in the government as proof of the validity of his anti-establishment arguments, while building up a charismatic leadership image as an experienced but outsider politician. In his speech at Marseille, Macron justified his portrayal of the mainstream major parties as a “clique of inefficacy” by saying “We are blocked by this permanent pendulum. We are living in this curse

of the French politics. I witnessed it in the government, in the parliament, in the state” (Rassemblement à Marseille - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron 2017).

A growing literature connects Macron’s emergence and electoral success to his skillful combination of anti-establishment with an empty-signifier of “revolution” as an electoral populist strategy (Fougère and Barthold 2020). In constructing his electoral discourse and political program, Macron identified the growing public distrust towards the mainstream major parties, which has been manifesting in declining voter turnout and the proliferation of new multiple radical parties in France (Durovic 2023). Macron filled the gap left by the demise of centrist politics by building up a personalized leadership with an anti-politics rhetoric (Monod 2019). Macron’s adversarial strategies against his electoral rivals took shape as an anti-establishment stance and contributed to his victory in the 2017 presidential elections.

To discredit the political establishment, Macron referred to it frequently with the negative meaning of “regulations”, as a connotation of something inhibiting, unresponsive to outsider demands looking for any change (Annonce de candidature à l’élection présidentielle de 2017 2016). Macron constantly argued that the political establishment does not do anything other than paralyzing any possibility of advancement, or enclosing France from the rest of the world, resulting in the weakening of democracy. For instance, while arguing that the existing French political system was stuck to old-fashioned regulations, Macron frequently referred to the mainstream major parties as “certain ones who are stuck in regulations” or “the ones dealing with the affairs” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Toulon 2017; Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Saint Priest Taurion 2017). Macron blamed the mainstream major parties for undervaluing the French people and being incompetent to adapt to societal transformations. For example, in his speech at Saint Priest Taurion, Macron said “When we see the transformation that we are going

through, today, we have to choose among two strategies for the country. One consists of the ones who say that we should enclose France to protect it, and continue with the existing regulations, or the others who say that we have to reestablish France because the French people do not know. This is what the others propose” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Saint Priest Taurion 2017). The existing establishment poses obstacles against new reforms to deal with the long-term social and economic troubles and poses a barrier between the people and the political class. Hence, it should be changed completely, and a profound renovation is needed.

Based on his adversarial strategies against the mainstream major parties and the political establishment, Macron frequently defined the 2017 presidential elections as a “battle between progressists and conservatists” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron de Dijon 2017). He presented his political program as a “project of emancipation” (Annonce de candidature à l'élection présidentielle de 2017 2016) and as “a profound re-establishment of French politics”. Based on this, he pictured his political movement as the “real actor of renovation” vis-à-vis the establishment parties stuck in affairs or ideological cleavages. In his Marseille speech, he used the major parties’ attacking himself as an opportunity to label them as a “clan of revenge” who gave up fighting against the Front National, which he described as “the real threat to the republic” (Rassemblement à Marseille - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron 2017).

After the first round of presidential elections in 2017, Macron started to run against only the populist extremist right-wing Front Nationale, and he concentrated his adversarial strategies on this party. However, even before the first round, Macron used direct adversarial strategies against the Front Nationale by associating this party with the mainstream major parties and the political establishment that he frequently denigrated. He portrayed Front Nationale as the part and by-product of the establishment. He argued that Front National played over the people’s fear and anger

who feel excluded from the trajectory of progress driven by global advancement for its own political ends (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Toulon 2017; Macron, Discours du 1er mai d'Emmanuel Macron 2017). In his speech in Marseille, his quote about the Front Nationale “We will be the winner, not the Front Nationale, because we will fight them, because they play over the popular fear, because their victims are the popular class and the middle class, because they will get retired in their chateau in the end. We don’t want it” is illustrative of how Macron constructed his populist extremist rival the Front Nationale as part of the devil elite by associating with the devil political establishment.

By portraying the Front National as part of the devil elite, Macron delegitimized the Front Nationale and strengthened his charismatic image with intense rhetoric. He frequently defined his rivalry with the Front Nationale as a “battle between patriots and nationalists” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron de Châtelleraut 2017; Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Saint Priest Taurion 2017; Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron de Dijon 2017). While he portrayed himself as a progressist and patriotic leader who knew how to channel the people’s demands into politics, he described the Front Nationale as a dangerous nationalist nourishing hatred and exclusion in society. In juxtaposition with the mainstream major parties and the Front National, he defined his political program as “the spirit of conquer” to construct himself as a unifying and inclusionary leader as opposed to his electoral rival as a dangerous part of “the devil elite” who is dividing society for its own political ends.

Referring to Macron’s appeal to the people and claim to be an expert in implementing what he constructed as the general will, several scholars named Macron a technocratic populist (Perottino and Guasti 2020; Bickerton and Accetti 2021). As a cause of Macron’s victory, scholars refer to the changing political landscape in France in which the mainstream major parties, namely the Socialist

Party and the Republican Party, lost credibility among the public and the unpopularity of the ideological cleavage, which has been a determinative aspect of the Fifth Republic (Perottino and Guasti 2020; Bickerton and Accetti 2021; Durovic 2023; Fougère and Barthold 2020). Macron made use of the growing public distrust and resentment towards the mainstream major parties to thrust himself forward as a charismatic leader with the help of his people-centric and anti-establishment rhetoric. Bickerton and Accetti (2021) classify Macron's *Republique En Marche!* movement as "technopopulist through the leader" as the movement promotes the personalized leadership of Macron. Echoing Moffitt (2016), similar to Joe Biden, Macron appealed to his electorate by constructing antagonism between the political establishment as the devil elite and the pure people.

In conclusion, during his presidential campaign in 2017, Macron constructed a category of the devil elite consisting of the major parties established in the political system and his populist extremist right-wing rival the *Front Nationale* with the help of the discursive strategies elaborated above in detail. In addition, Macron was able to construct a Manichean worldview in which his electoral discourse separated the French political system into two camps; one consists of the French people dealing with the severe crisis and fighting for a profound change, unity, and democracy and the other camp consists of the major parties the Socialist Party and the Republican Party who had been alternating political power among each other for thirty years, being stuck to the existing order and estranged from what the people need and want. In most of his electoral speeches, Macron appealed to his electorate by constructing an elaborate antagonism between the political establishment and the people. In addition to the anti-establishment stance in his discursive strategies of anti-elitism, Macron mobilized an inclusionary and unifying notion of the pure people.



## **Chapter 4: Invoking a public sense of crisis and narrative of national wisdom**

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the discursive strategies that Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron utilized in their presidential campaigns to portray their electoral rivals as dangers to the country. Echoing Moffitt's (2016) one of the criteria of populist style, namely the invocation of a public sense of threat, both Biden and Macron used their discursive strategies to invoke a public sense of crisis and constructed a pro-democratic inclusionary narrative of national wisdom. Also, they utilized their narrative of national wisdom to portray their populist rivals as a threat to the nation, while facilitating their charismatic leadership image as a defender of the national values. Both Biden and Macron used analogies between their presidential rivalry with their populist rivals and historical milestone events in their own countries to invoke a public sense of urgent action to defeat the so-called threat by their populist rivals. Their narrative of national wisdom helped Biden and Macron to facilitate their discursive antagonism between the unified pure people and their populist rivals whom they constructed as the devil elite.

### **4.1 Joe Biden's 2020 Presidential Campaign**

In his 2020 presidential campaign, Joe Biden used many discursive strategies to portray his electoral rival Donald Trump as a threat to the country and national values. First, he frequently used slogan-like statements against Trump to argue that Trump posed a dangerous threat to national values. By drawing on nationwide salient issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the upheaval of the racial justice movement Black Lives Matter in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd due to police brutality, and the decline of the national economy in 2020, Biden urged his audience to vote for him and to defeat Trump as an urgent action. In constructing his portrayal of Trump as a

danger, Biden mostly referred to Trump's polarizing, racist, and anti-science discourse during his presidential incumbency, and he repeated these statements in most of his voter mobilization speeches. Second, Biden drew analogies between the then-upcoming presidential elections in 2020 and the milestone events in American history such as the Civil War between 1861 and 1865 or the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. With the help of these analogies, Biden was able to construct an inclusionary and pro-democratic narrative of "national values", and he portrayed his electoral rival Trump as an enemy of "national values". Through these discursive strategies, Biden invoked a public sense of crisis and mobilized voters to vote for him as an urgent action to defeat Trump.

By referring to the salient societal issues on the agenda, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the upheaval of the racial justice movement Black Lives Matter after the killing of George Floyd, and the economic recession during the pandemic, Biden argued that the United States was going through a national crisis. In his Democratic National Convention speech, Biden said "our, four historic crises, all at the same time. A perfect storm, the worst pandemic in over a hundred years, the worst economic crisis since The Great Depression, the most compelling call for racial justice since the sixties, and just the accelerating threats of climate change." (Joe Biden 2020 DNC Speech Transcript 2020). He frequently emphasized Trump's rejectionism of the COVID-19 pandemic and Trump's racist and anti-immigration remarks during his incumbency, and he constructed Trump as a danger feeding on the national crisis. He frequently used slogan-like statements such as "Trump fans the flames of hate and division" (Joe Biden 2020 DNC Speech Transcript 2020; Super Tuesday Speech Transcripts: Biden, Sanders, Warren, Bloomberg Speeches to Supporters 2020). While talking about the pandemic and the racialized violence, Biden argued that Trump was extracting political advantage by saying that "Donald Trump looks at this violence and he sees a political lifeline" (Joe Biden Pittsburgh Speech Transcript August 31 2020).

As another strategy to portray Trump as a danger to the nation, Biden highlighted Trump's racist discourse as the facilitator of societal division, which he defined as part of the "national crisis". He quoted Trump's racist remarks by saying "He said 'we're going to go out and get those rapist Mexicans.' Rapist Mexicans. He put a ban on all Muslims coming to the United States. And the way he talked about the African-American community. The way he talked about the Hispanic community." (Joe Biden Campaign Event Speech Transcript Philadelphia November 1 2020). Through the discursive theme of "national crisis", Biden effectively simplified and intensified his rhetoric to mobilize votes by constructing Trump's image as a danger to the national unity and safety and to invoke a sense of urgency to vote against Trump to get rid of the national crisis. Biden's words in Wisconsin "We can change the path we're on, but we have to act now, because we can't afford four more years of Donald Trump" is illustrative of such simplification and intensification of his rhetoric (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020). He repeated his rhetoric by saying "We cannot afford four more years of anger, hate, and division that we've seen under this president" (Joe Biden Campaign Event Speech Transcript Philadelphia November 1 2020)

To facilitate his portrayal of Trump as a danger to the country, Biden blamed Trump's rejectionism concerning the COVID-19 pandemic for the high death rates and economic harm due to the closure of small businesses. He frequently quoted Trump's reactions to the pandemic such as "We are not going to control the pandemic" or "It's going to go away. We're learning to live with it" to blame Trump for being "irresponsible" and not "doing his job". (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Atlanta, Georgia October 27 2020; Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020) In juxtaposition to Trump's anti-science discourse, Biden referred to the experiences of doctors and nurses and experts' urgent call to wear masks and put social distancing

(Joe Biden Pittsburgh Speech Transcript August 31 2020; Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020). Biden argued for the need to take appropriate health measures while opening businesses and financing these measures (Joe Biden Gettysburg Campaign Speech Transcript October 6 2020). He supported his argument by referring to the pandemic statistics and quotes from scientific experts (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Atlanta, Georgia October 27 2020; Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020). He frequently facilitated his argument with anti-politics rhetoric by saying “This virus doesn’t care whether you live, or where you live, what political party you belong to, it affects us all. It will take anyone’s life. It’s a virus. It’s not a political weapon” (Joe Biden Gettysburg Campaign Speech Transcript October 6 2020) or “Donald Trump refuses to listen to the science. He’s politicized the race for vaccine as well” (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 30 2020) (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Atlanta, Georgia October 27 2020). Biden used anti-politics rhetoric not only to construct a public sense of a unified general will but also to facilitate his portrayal of Trump as a danger to the general will.

During the upheaval of the Black Lives Matter movement, Biden condemned Trump’s quote “There are good people on both sides”, referring to the White supremacist movements, and this helped Biden to portray Trump as “dangerous” to the national unity (Joe Biden 2020 DNC Speech Transcript 2020; Joe Biden Gettysburg Campaign Speech Transcript October 6 2020). In most of his voter mobilization speeches, Biden frequently highlighted that his incumbent rival Trump acted to facilitate racialized violence for his own political ends at the expense of the common good. Biden constructed a unified notion of common good and Trump’s incumbency as a threat against it by saying “The common threat, the incumbent president who makes things worse, not better, an incumbent president who sows chaos rather than providing order. An incumbent president who fails

in the basic duty of the job, which is to advance the truth that all of us know, that we're all born with the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" (Joe Biden Pittsburgh Speech Transcript August 31 2020). He likened Trump's hesitancy to condemn racial hatred and police violence to the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s by saying "Remember seeing those neo-Nazis, and Klansmen, and white supremacists coming out of fields with lighted torches, veins bulging, spewing the same anti-Semitic bile heard across Europe in the thirties" (Biden, Joe Biden Gettysburg Campaign Speech Transcript October 6 2020). These analogies provided Biden with strong rhetoric to mobilize votes by invoking a public sense of crisis.

In contrast to Trump's racism and hesitancy to condemn racial violence, Biden frequently emphasized how he had been close to the Black community and supported the BLM movement. He made frequent reference to the killing of George Floyd by police brutality such as by quoting from George Floyd's daughter's words "Daddy changed the world" (Joe Biden Gettysburg Campaign Speech Transcript October 6 2020) or by saying "This campaign is about winning for those communities who have known the injustice of a knee on the neck against the violence of extremists (Joe Biden Pittsburgh Speech Transcript August 31 2020) (Joe Biden 2020 DNC Speech Transcript 2020). While declaring his presidential candidacy Biden said "It was a wake-up call for us as a country, and for me, a call to action". (Joe Biden 2020 DNC Speech Transcript 2020)

Another discursive strategy that Biden utilized to invoke a public sense of crisis is to resonate the nationwide salient problems with the historical turning-point events. In his declaration of presidential candidacy at the Democratic National Convention, Biden quoted Ella Baker, a famous Civil Rights Movement activist, saying "Give people a light, and they will find a way" to build a savior image for himself. In his speech at Gettysburg, Biden talked about the American Civil War and quoted frequently from Abraham Lincoln. He argued that under Trump's incumbency, the

country was going through a big crisis due to social division and racial hatred. He intensified his rhetoric of danger by comparing Trump's incumbency to the events during the American Civil War. He portrayed Abraham Lincoln as a legendary president who acted decisively to end the Civil War by quoting from him saying "Our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" (Joe Biden Gettysburg Campaign Speech Transcript October 6 2020). As another example, Biden quoted Franklin Roosevelt who was president during the Great Depression and World War 2, which were two milestone periods in American history. He portrayed these famous American leaders as hopeful, exemplary, hardworking notable figures who took decisive actions to save their countries from big crises. In his speech at Pittsburg, Biden said "In the early days of World War II, Franklin Roosevelt told the country, and I quote, "The news is going to get worse and worse before it gets better and better." (Joe Biden Pittsburgh Speech Transcript August 31 2020). These references from historically notable political figures facilitated Biden's construction of Trump's incumbency as a "national crisis" and a public sense of urgency to get rid of Trump.

Apart from the public sense of crisis, Biden's analogy between the then-contemporary issues and the historical events provided him with a strong rhetorical ground to develop a narrative of "national wisdom". Such a narrative helped Biden construct himself as a "savior leader" and a defender of "the real American values" while constructing his rival Trump as a "danger" to the nation. For example, Biden said "Abraham Lincoln taught us about the need for a united nation. I was reminded of Franklin Roosevelt, who taught us the need to heal our nation. Folks, I'm running as a proud Democrat, but I'll govern as an American president to unite and to heal." (Joe Biden Campaign Speech Transcript Atlanta, Georgia October 27 2020). Using historical references, Biden invoked a public sense of nostalgia about original national values and portrayed Trump as an enemy

of these values. In his Super Tuesday speech, he illustrated it by saying “Folks, we just have to remember who we are. My Lord, this is the United States of America, and it’s time for America to get back up, and once again, fight for the proposition that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, and that by the creator with certain inalienable rights but up to this President, we’ve never walked away from it.” (Super Tuesday Speech Transcripts: Biden, Sanders, Warren, Bloomberg Speeches to Supporters 2020) While mobilizing his audience to vote against Trump for the sake of “national wisdom”, Biden facilitated an image of a “savior leader” through a simplified but intense rhetoric of bringing the national wisdom back. In his speech at the Democratic National Convention, Biden frequently used such rhetoric by saying “I see a different America, one that’s generous and strong, selfless, and humble. It’s an America we could rebuild together” or “I will be an ally of the light, not the darkness” (Joe Biden 2020 DNC Speech Transcript 2020).

#### **4.2. Emmanuel Macron’s 2017 Presidential Campaign**

During his 2017 presidential campaign, Emmanuel Macron argued that France was going through a critical juncture due to global transformations such as the digital revolution or the new world order. He frequently used the slogan “the need to bring France into the 21<sup>st</sup> century” to invoke a public sense of urgent action to vote for his political program while accusing the mainstream major parties of being estranged from the transformations and letting the Front Nationale flourish as a danger to the national values. To justify his liberalization reforms, he produced slogans that referred to the motto of the French Revolution “liberté, égalité, fraternité”, and he defined his political program as “reconciling liberty and equality”. While accusing the established major parties of being stuck in ideological polemics, he argued for a need to transcend ideological divides and for a united society. In juxtaposition to the mainstream major parties, he portrayed himself as the real

representative of the national values such as being a “real progressist” or “real republican”. Occasionally, Macron used an analogy between the then-upcoming presidential elections and historical events, such as the French Revolution or the joining of France in the Second World War and invoked a sense of urgent action to vote for him by arguing that the elections would determine the country’s future. Through these arguments, Macron constructed a narrative of “national wisdom”, and portrayed his electoral rivals as either estranged from or threatening national values. This narrative of “national wisdom” helped him simplify and intensify his rhetoric to mobilize votes, which he occasionally constructed as a “patriotic duty”.

In his multiple speeches, Macron frequently argued that France was going through a critical juncture by referring to global transformations and their discontents such as digitalization, globalization, a new world order in international politics, the rise of terrorism and authoritarianism worldwide (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Lyon 2017; Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Toulon 2017). Connected to his anti-establishment rhetoric, Macron argued that mainstream major parties did not have the vision to address these transformations, the society was driven into fear, anger, and polarization, and he presented his political program as “bringing France into the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Toulon 2017; Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Lyon 2017; Annonce de candidature à l'élection présidentielle de 2017 2016; Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron de Dijon 2017). This slogan provided him with intense rhetoric to defend his political program as “progressivist” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron de Dijon 2017), which he used as a basis to make a reference to the French Revolution (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Lyon 2017) and to construct his narrative of “national wisdom”.



Macron's political program consisted of several liberalization reforms, such as repealing universal income policies and social aid programs, while proposing a system of government assistance for entrepreneurship and investment. Macron justified his liberalization program by telling the stories of himself encountering and listening to persons who lost their jobs. He argued that the universal income system is the cause of long-term unemployment in France because it discourages creating or looking for new jobs. In contrast to this, he qualified his reforms as "reconciling liberty and equality" (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Toulon 2017; Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Lyon 2017). While the rhetoric of liberty is usually utilized by rightist politicians and the rhetoric of equality is used by the leftist politicians in France. This referential strategy has two important discursive implications. First, it implicitly provides an image of Macron as a savior leader who would defend and protect these values associated with progressivism, especially with the French Revolution. Second, it gives the audience the impression that Macron's political program is the only one that transcends the ideology-based party cleavage, unlike the major parties. It is also connected to his anti-establishment arguments in which he showed the ideological differences between the major parties, mainly the center-right Republicans and the leftist Socialist Party alternating power for thirty years, as the cause of the crisis. He presented his political program as "the spirit of conquer" to imply that his program transcends the ideological cleavages and unifies people with different ideologies (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Saint Priest Taurion 2017).

Another discursive strategy that Macron used to defend his political program was to call it a "reconciliation between territories in France" (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Saint Priest Taurion 2017). Macron used it to justify his argument that villages and small towns needed investment to develop and provide job opportunities equal to the already-developed

industrial cities. With such reference, Macron justified his intention to repeal the existing universal income system policies, such as RSA<sup>1</sup>, by arguing that the existing social aid system disincentivizes people from investing or looking for jobs. In his speech in Lyon, Macron said “The people do not want this, but they want jobs, we should liberate the labor and better salaries. We are refusing the politics of aid. It is not ultra-liberalism, but it is a politics of necessity. We should liberate the conditions of innovating” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Lyon 2017). In addition, he intensified his rhetoric by defining his program as “fighting for liberty and equality” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Angers 2017; Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Lyon 2017).

In addition to the motto of the French Revolution, Macron made reference to the historical figures in France to invoke a public sense of crisis and urgent action to vote for him. As an example, he used a narrative of national heroism. In his speech in Lyon, Macron made an analogy between the participants of his meeting and a story in the renowned French poem “Feuillets d’Hypnos” written by René Char, which was about his memoirs of fighting against the German soldiers in the Second World War era (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Lyon 2017). While qualifying his political movement as a “battle for liberty, equality and fraternity”, Macron said “we need the energy and talent of Emile Zola and Charles Peguy” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Lyon 2017). These references contributed to Macron's invocation of a public sense of crisis. In his speech at Toulon, Macron defined the elections as a “test of solidarity for our democracy” (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Toulon 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Active Solidarity Revenue (*Révenu de Solidarité Active*) is a financial aid for unemployed people to provide a minimum level of income

The aforementioned mottos to which Macron made frequent reference such as “liberty”, “equality”, “fraternity”, “republicanism”, “progressivism” provided him with an intense rhetorical basis to invoke a sense of a unified “common good”. While portraying himself as a defender of the common good, he portrayed mainstream major parties as indifferent to the common good and the Front Nationale as a danger against the common good. By portraying himself as a “real patriot open to the changing world” (Rassemblement à Marseille - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron 2017), or as a “real republican” (Discours du 1er mai d'Emmanuel Macron 2017), he constructed himself as a “savior leader”. In his multiple speeches, he condemned mainstream major parties for being too busy fighting against him and estranged from the people’s daily lives and the changing world. For example, he qualified them as a “clan of revenge” (Rassemblement à Marseille - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron 2017) and said that “They decided to turn their back on the Republic and follow the Front Nationale. We are here, and here, we will win. Today, why are they united against us? Why do they have one common point in attacking us?” (Rassemblement à Marseille - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron 2017). Especially after the first round of the presidential elections on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, he intensified his portrayal of the Front Nationale as a danger against the country and the national wisdom. In his multiple speeches, he argued that the Front Nationale played over the popular anger and fear for the sake of its own political ends (Retranscription du discours d'Emmanuel Macron à Toulon 2017; Rassemblement à Marseille - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron 2017; Discours du 1er mai d'Emmanuel Macron 2017). In addition, he defined the Front Nationale as “an anti-France party” by arguing that the party wanted to weaken France's national values and strength (Macron, Discours du 1er mai d'Emmanuel Macron 2017).

## Conclusion and Future Research

This thesis urges scholarly attention to the issue of the mainstream adoption of populist style in established democracies. This study moved from the question of how mainstream centrist politicians can gain electoral benefit under severe pushing factors, such as a two-horse nature of a presidential rivalry with a strong populist extremist rival, growing affective polarization among society, and growing public distrust towards centrism and political establishment. The 2020 presidential elections in the United States and the 2017 French presidential elections are ideal cases to illustrate this with empirical research, as mainstream Joe Biden won the elections against populist Donald Trump in the United States, and a then-newly emerging centrist actor Emmanuel Macron won the elections against populist extremist right-wing Marine Le Pen. Hence, this thesis presents a comparative cross-case study of the electoral discourse of Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron.

Taking a constructivist approach to populism and electoral discourse, this thesis fills a gap in the existing comparative empirical research on the mainstream adoption of populism. It draws on Moffitt's (2016) conceptualization of populism as a political style consisting of three elements, which are 1) appeal to the constructed category of the pure people vis-à-vis the constructed category of the devil elite, 2) invoking a public perception of threat by the constructed category of the devil elite, and 3) displaying unconventional manners in public settings. To be consistent with the theoretical approach, this thesis adopts the methodological approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak and Meyer 2009). To deconstruct and contextualize the populist elements in the electoral discourse of Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron, this thesis applies the Discourse-Historical Analysis guidelines of political discursive strategies as one of the methods of CDA (Reisigl and Wodak 2016).

Building on the analysis of Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron's discursive strategies in their voter mobilization speeches, this thesis finds out common discursive themes between the presidential campaign discourse of Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron with different nuances based on the specific dynamics of the political landscapes in their own countries. Echoing Moffitt's (2016) criteria of populist style, both Biden and Macron appealed to the people by deploying close involvement with the middle and working class and constructing them as the pure people. Whereas they juxtaposed the category of the pure people with their populist electoral rivals. Both Biden and Macron frequently used anti-elitist rhetoric to denigrate their populist rivals and constructed them as the devil elite unresponsive to the pure people. Second, Biden and Macron constructed a pro-democratic inclusionary narrative of national wisdom. While depicting their populist rivals as a danger to the nation, they constructed themselves as a real representative of national values.

Biden and Macron effectively mobilized a Manichean worldview consisting of the antagonism between the pure people and their electoral rivals as the devil elite. Using analogies between the presidential elections and historical events and depicting their populist rivals as dangers to the nation, Biden and Macron mobilized a unified notion of the general will. As a corollary to these discursive strategies, Biden and Macron built a charismatic leadership image by claiming to be a real representative of the national values and the pure people who would save the country from the devil elite and implement what the pure people want. While the two criteria of Moffitt (2016) exist in Biden and Macron's presidential campaign discourse, namely appeal to the people and invocation of public perception of threat, Biden and Macron's presidential campaign discourse does not fit the criterion of unconventional manners in public settings. However, the core elements of populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), namely people-centrism, anti-elitism, and a morally enforced unified general will, and the auxiliary performative elements of populism such

as charismatic leadership, simple and intense communication (see Canovan 1999) significantly exist in the presidential campaign discourse of Joe Biden in 2020 and Emmanuel Macron in 2017.

It should be equally noted that this thesis has several limitations. This thesis aimed to shed light for further research on the effectiveness of populist style in mainstream campaigning in liberal democracies under challenging dynamics of increasing voter appeal to populist extremism, personalization of politics, rising affective polarization, and growing public distrust towards centrism. However, given the scope and limitations of the thesis, it does not claim any generalizability. In other words, it does not claim that the usage of populist style is the cause of Biden and Macron's electoral victory over their populist rivals Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen. Rather, this thesis unpacked the commonalities of the populist discursive strategies in Macron and Biden's presidential campaign discourse under similar presidential rivalry settings and with similar results. Even though this thesis remained at the descriptive level, its results are hoped to open up new scholarly questions and debates over the prominence of populist logic and how it interacts with the transforming axis of political competition and societal cleavages in liberal democracies.

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## Appendix

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