

# Functions of the Word “Democracy” in Right-Wing Populist Discourses

The Case of the Rassemblement National in France

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# Right-wing populism

## In the literature

- **Anti-democratic**
  - Backes (2004); Carter (2005) ; Khosravini & Mral (2013); Shekhovtsov (2013); Passmore (2016)...
- Not necessarily opposed to democratic institutions but to **values**
  - Betz (2004); Kallis (2013); Camus & Lebourg (2015); Gauthier (2015);

## In the political discourse

- presents itself as **defender** of democracy
- RWP is no longer opposed to democracy in its speeches. On the contrary, it wishes to defend it against the EU, immigration and Muslim culture
  - Taguieff (2012) ; Mayer (2016); Bowler (2017)...

# Approach and methodology (1)

- Study the discourse of the RN in France
  - RN is traditionally classified as “right-wing populist” (“extreme-right”, “far-right”, “radical-right”, “xenophobic and nationalist right”,...)
  - **Discourse** is here defined as the addition of a text and its context structured by an enunciation system (Van Dijk 1977; Maingeneau 2016).
  - Discourse must be studied as a tool or as a mode of access to intentions, strategies or ideologies ( Titscher 2000; Angermüller 2007). Thus is consider as “social practice” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Krzyzanowski 2010).

## Approach and methodology (2)

- Study the discourse of the RN in France
  - All the discourse of the RN available on its websites between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2018;
  - Publicly validated (Mudde 2000);
  - Targeted at a community of individuals who share a sense of belonging to the same world of meanings and values;
  - Diversify the speakers and media to have a broader vision (Pauwels 2011).

# Lexicometric approach

- 3,460 documents published on the RN website
- The lemma "Democracy" appears 682 times in 350 documents
  - variation over time: (more used during elections);
  - variation according to the type of document: (more used in documents intended for a wide audience)

	Occ.	Demo. Doc.	Total Doc.	Ratio
Announcement	17	3	36	0,08
Press release	415	260	2622	0,10
<b>Press conf.</b>	18	3	7	<b>0,43</b>
<b>Speech</b>	129	26	42	<b>0,62</b>
Intervention	31	17	425	0,04
Free	69	39	226	0,17

# Critical Discourse Analysis

- EXAMPLE 1: “François Bayrou, Jean-Christophe Lagarde, ... These experts in electoral negotiations, these guardians of the temple of old politics, of tricks, of apparatus arrangements, who ask to pay for their support. Be lucid about the role of these old men: they are here to arrange the distribution of posts; they pay themselves in legislative constituencies [...] That is the reality! That is the political scam we do not want anymore. Where is the government project? Where is the sincerity of political commitment? Where are these people’s values? [...] The system, in reality, does everything to try to survive. Have no doubt, they use all means, even illegal, immoral, anti-democratic, anti-republican. But against the Left of money, against the Right of money, against this greedy system, we are campaigning for the French people” (LE PEN, March 11, 2017)
- EXAMPLE 2: “You thought it appropriate to devote two full pages of your newspaper, announced in front page, twice to calling for a vote against me in the regional elections. You do so without even giving me the floor, which already has a long way to go in terms of your professional ethics and the particular conception of democracy that seems to animate you” (LE PEN, December 1, 2015)

# RN: Critical discourse analysis

- EXAMPLE 3: “The FN would like to start by congratulating Ms. May on the consistency of her position and her determination to respect the sovereign decision of the British people. Faced with multiple national and European pressure, the British Prime Minister is giving search a great lesson of democracy to all those tempted to move, once again, beyond the popular will” (RN, March 30, 2017)
- EXAMPLE 4: “While the sense of independence is clearly in the minority in Catalonia and democratic political forces that respect the Constitution of the Spanish State and its unity are opposed to these separatist and extremist tendencies, we would like to know the Commission's position, knowing that the Spanish State is a sovereign nation” (ALIOT, January 13, 2016)

# RN: Critical discourse analysis

- EXAMPLE 5 : “I will create a popular initiative referendum, which works so well in Switzerland, Italy and other countries. This means that the referendum will no longer be on the initiative of the president of the Republic alone, but also of the French people, if 500,000 citizens manage to collect signatures on a bill or a proposal to withdraw a law. Adult democracy is a democracy that trusts the people, because it knows that they are wise” (Le Pen 2017)
- EXAMPLE 6: “Our struggle is that of our identity and therefore that of our sovereignty. A country that loses its wealth is weakening. A country that burdens itself with taxes is getting poorer. A country that sees its identity erased is threatened because it no longer knows where it comes from, who it is. But a country that breaks with both its sovereignty and its identity is lost. However, as you can see every day, France is experiencing an amputation of its sovereignty and our people are losing their identity [...] We no longer wish to be deprived of our democratic power!” (LE PEN, March 26, 2017)



# Conclusion

- Democracy has a “cosmetic function”;
- BUT democracy has an “ideological function” too:
  - Nationalism;
  - Identity;
  - Chauvinism.
- Spreading a particular vision of democracy;
- Politicizing certain issues (Immigration, EU).
- “Identity democracy” or “national democracy” is not necessarily an oxymoron but rather a matter for debate to be grasped.

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