

The Sirens' Song

Use of the Term "Democracy" in the Speeches of the RN, the FPÖ and the AfD

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Historically, the literature has defined the “far right”, the “radical right” or “right-wing populism” (hereafter RWP) as political organizations that are opposed to democracy. Depending on the author considered, this opposition is institutional (RWP wants to overthrow democratic institutions) or valorical (RWP would be incompatible with a democratic society).

However, if we question the political field, RWP in its speech presents itself as the defender of democracy. Thus, in France, the Rassemblement National (RN), in Austria, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) and, in Germany, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), aim to “recover”, “restore”, or “protect” democracy. Through this “democratic rhetoric”, the literature argues that this is essentially a symbolic discourse rooted in a strategy of “normalization” of the parties to make them respectable in the eyes of the voter. I aim to further refine this assumption by asking the question: in the speeches of these parties, is “democracy” only a symbolic term, a strategic argument or is “democracy” also ideologically loaded? In other words, could it be argued that “democracy”, in populist discourse, corresponds to a symbolic argument as well as a very specific ideological lexis?

To answer this question, I first propose to concentrate on the relationship between RWP and democracy as studied in the literature. Second, I will study the term “democracy” in RN, FPÖ and AfD discourses by carrying out a lexicometric analysis before combining it with a critical discourse analysis, from a more qualitative perspective. The objective is to question the context of the enunciation of the term “democracy”. “Discourse” is here defined as the addition of a text and its context structured by an enunciation. So discourse must be studied as a tool or as a mode of access to intentions, strategies or ideologies. For this presentation, I decided to study all the discourses of these parties available on their websites between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2018. Third, I will deal with different functions of the term “democracy” in the discourse (emotional, symbolic, rhetorical, legitimacy and ideological function) while highlighting some of the tensions in its rhetoric. The case of the FPÖ allows me to compare the speeches of a party that is a member of the opposition and then a member of the government. Finally, I will conclude my presentation by answering my research question and relate it to the notion of illiberal an identity democracy.