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Insecurity narratives and implicit emotional appeals in French competing populisms

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The salience of security concerns has dramatically increased across Europe and a growing body of research converges on their acknowledgement as contributing factors to populist success. As the empirical focus of existing research is on the populist right and on negative emotionality, this paper questions to what extent the populism-(in)security nexus is indeed distinctive to the right and predominantly underpinned by fear-based appeals. By adopting a novel typology of insecurity-framing and a qualitative strategy that infers emotions from core relational themes, the paper explores the implicit emotional content of populist insecurity narratives in France, looking at campaign communication from Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The article offers three contributions. First, by mapping which emotions underpin their insecurity narratives, it illustrates how these populist actors perform 'emotional governance', addressing the number of ontological insecurities generally linked to populist voting. Second, it shows that not only exclusionary but also inclusionary populists engage with processes of threat framing and do so with overlapping overarching themes. Finally, it proposes a qualitative approach that captures the holistic meaning of emotions via the methodological use of core relational themes, complementing word-based analyses.

Keywords: Emotions; populism; insecurity; narratives; Le Pen; Mélenchon

Introduction

Although security has always been a prominent concern in European politics, the salience of such issues among the public has increased dramatically, as evidenced by available surveys (e.g. Ipsos series What The World Worries About). The growing salience suggests that issues that relate to security and insecurity become a central element of the views that citizens develop about candidates, parties and programs.

Studying political communication is an important part of the research endeavors necessary to understand citizens' experience of contemporary (in)security. As Bar-Tal (2020) argues, citizens rely on external sources to make sense of their security environment and to form their beliefs. Among external sources, political leaders are central in guiding the deconstruction of information and the creation of meaning because they hold, present and interpret information, while also guiding the public as to how to cope

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with and deal with modern threats (ibid.). Moreover, the increasing 'personalization of politics' tends to channel citizens' attention to individual politicians rather than political parties (Adam and Maier 2010), making political leaders' communication of pivotal importance for opinion-formation.

This paper is interested in unpacking the different ways in which European left and right populists engage with (in)security themes, looking specifically at the affective underpinnings of their narratives. European populists deserve particular analytical attention in relation to insecurity for two main reasons; first, extant research points to a number of structural and ontological insecurities in fostering their success in Europe (Grande and Kriesi 2012; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen 2018); second, insecurity and grievances hold an important position in the discursive repertoire of such actors (Béland 2019; Homolar and Scholz 2019; Wodak 2015).

Emotions have long been considered an integral part of both populist discourse (Canovan 1984) and the experience of insecurity (Van Rythoven 2015), although a more complete, systematic scrutiny is only a recent development in political science and populism research (see e.g. Cossarini and Vallespín 2019; Demertzis 2006, 2019; Eklundh, Zevnik, and Guittet 2017). Here they are regarded, in line with appraisal theories, as responses to external stimuli that are relevant for the individual (Brader 2005; Damasio 2000). Appraising means evaluating the personal significance of stimuli from the surrounding environment; it is then the *relational meaning* attributed to what is happening that determines which emotions are experienced (Lazarus 2006b). Each emotion is linked to a specific relational meaning, more commonly labeled core relational theme (CRT); a CRT is the prototypical script associated with an emotional experience and it reflects how an emotion has been typically found to be aroused in most people (Lazarus 2006a). Applied to the study of political communication, this implies that messages containing certain features that tap into a specific CRT are likely to elicit the emotions linked to those appraisal patterns (Nabi 2003). Emotional appeals are therefore intended as message components that carry and elicit emotions (Brader 2005).

Studying the emotional underpinnings of populist discourse and potentially predicting the emotional experience it can generate is important because emotions serve a crucial intra-personal function, that of sense-making: once they emerge as a response to external stimuli, they help citizens make sense of reality and adapt behavior accordingly (for a review of emotions in politics, see Bonansinga 2020; for emotions in framing contests and decision-making see Sanchez Salgado 2021). If insecurity is increasingly salient and populist leaders devote particular attention to such themes, studying the emotional underpinnings of their insecurity narratives offers insights into how citizens can be potentially cued towards some interpretations rather than others. This is not to say that emotional appeals equal manipulation; in fact, as Cossarini and Vallespín (2019, 5) put it, 'it is not a matter of giving primacy to emotions over reason in political affairs, but rather of revealing their relationship, as well as their place in political studies, especially in the analysis of populism'. Posited for decades as 'the Other of rationality' (Demertzis 2013), emotions are being brought back into the analytical picture, underlining their blend and linkage with cognition (Demertzis 2019), rather than perpetuating a presumed conflict with reason that has been forcefully disproved by scientific scrutiny (Bonansinga 2020). As I stress throughout this article, studying the latent emotional content of populist insecurity narratives entails capturing their emotional *potential*, whereas the actual arousal of specific emotions depends on the individual's appraisal of the discursive cues.

The article provides three main contributions. First, it unpacks the way populists perform 'emotional governance' (Richards 2013), that is how they address, respond to

and attempt to regulate citizens' contemporary anxieties, showing that these actors can use a complex set of emotional appeals that go beyond the monolithic experience of fear that existing studies attribute to the populism-insecurity nexus (Wodak 2015). Second, it shows that, despite extant scholarship tends to associate 'security' with the populist right, such narratives are not incompatible with left-wing populism. On the contrary, by moving beyond traditionalist understandings of security and freeing the concept from its association with issues relating exclusively to crime and law enforcement, the article shows how left-wing populists similarly engage with insecurity narratives. Finally, it proposes to extend the psychological and sociological insights on the study of implicit emotions to populism research. It adopts a qualitative research strategy that infers emotional appeals from core relational themes (CRTs) in order to capture the latent emotional fabric of populist insecurity discourse. By analyzing CRTs, the article identifies the objective discursive features that have the potential to arouse distinct emotions in the audience, thus capturing the holistic meaning of the separate appraisals that constitute an emotional experience (Lazarus 2001).

The article is structured as follows: I first provide a theoretical examination on the link between (in)security and populism in Europe, highlighting a gap in our knowledge of how diverging populisms engage with insecurity narratives and of the emotions attributable to these narratives. After introducing the constructivist perspective that I here adopt and its emotional underpinnings, I present a narrative framework for capturing emotionality in both right and left narratives of insecurity. I apply the framework to the French case, a rare display of successful competing populisms within the same political system (Shields 2021) and a context where insecurity was particularly salient during the last elections (Mayer 2018). The analysis of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, prototypical expressions of respectively right and left populism (on Le Pen, see e.g. Ivaldi 2018a, 2018b; on Mélenchon see e.g. Chiocchetti 2020; Marlière 2019), shows that their divergent populist narratives follow ideological lines in making claims about insecurity but also overlap in key overarching themes and emotion regulation strategies.

(In)security and populism

Populist actors have gained significant prominence in European politics. Scholars assess their success based on a growing electoral appeal (Lewis et al. 2018); an increase in government participation and coalition support (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Albertazzi and Vampa 2021); and finally, on their ability to shift agendas, shape the public debate and influence other parties' positions on key issues such as immigration (Bale et al. 2010; Mudde 2013; Van Spanje 2010). These actors are characterized by what Cas Mudde (2004, 543) calls a thin-centered ideology 'that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people'. Although establishing the nature of the populist phenomenon is beyond the aims of this article, it is important to note that alternative approaches define populism as a style (Moffitt and Tormey 2014), a logic (Panizza 2005), a political strategy (Weyland 2001). As Mudde (2017) puts it, however, the ideational approach provides four advantages to empirical research, namely the *distinguishability* of non-populism cases, the *categorizability* of populist manifestations, the *travelability* of the concept for use across geographical regions and its *versatility* for studying different levels of analysis.

Because of its limited core, populism as a thin-ideology does not provide a comprehensive system of beliefs and always comes attached to other worldviews (Stanley

2008). One of the most established ways to distinguish between varieties of populism is along the two key dimensions of symbolic, material and political inclusion vs. exclusion, outlined by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013). While inclusionary populists advocate for a wide range of subgroups to be conceived as part of 'the people', to be entitled to resource redistribution and political participation (respectively, symbolic, material and political inclusion), exclusionary populists restrict these entitlements to specific groups, most notably the native population.[1]

How and why is insecurity relevant to populism research? The relationship between insecurity and populism can be thought of on a bidimensional level. On the one hand, structural processes such as globalization and a series of individual grievances and ontological insecurities that characterize post-industrial societies are said to provide fertile ground for populists to succeed (Grande and Kriesi 2012; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen 2018). On the other hand, populists are said to produce and reproduce insecurity through narratives: for Wodak (2015) they perform a 'politics of fear' via the rhetorical construction of certain groups, most notably minorities, as a threat to an 'us', a point similarly stressed by Béland (2019) who uses the term 'politics of insecurity' to denote the populist tendency to continuously framing and acting upon perceived collective threats. Borrowing from International Relations theory, Bonansinga (2019), Kurylo (2020) and Wojczewski (2020) argue that populists discursively transform certain phenomena into security issues through processes of securitization (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998).

While these studies take a specific form of populism (exclusionary populists) as their object of analysis, no study has addressed the question of whether and how European inclusionary populists address contemporary insecurity in their narratives. I argue that this research gap is due to the way we think of 'security' in relation to populism. First, we often associate the term with the set of campaign issues relating to crime and law and order, which the populist right programmatically owns (Mudde 2010). In contrast, such themes seem out of place within a left populist ideology centered on the socio-economic dimension (Charalambous and Ioannu 2020; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019). Second, populist narratives on insecurity are often associated with the controversial strategies of the radical right, which scapegoat minorities and marginalize social groups by portraying them as 'dangerous Others' (Wodak 2015). Since left and right populists are said not to share the same exclusionary values (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013), any engagement of the former with themes and narratives of insecurity has remained overlooked.

To address this gap and free insecurity narratives from this baggage, I take a constructivist view on security, considering the latter not as an a priori reality but as the result of processes of threat construction. Adding on to the available literature (e.g. Béland 2019; Kurylo 2020) I suggest looking at *a set of frames* that embed insecurity in political narratives. Bringing together different works of literature on the polysemy of security and insecurity (for a review, see Bourbeau 2015), I argue that framing an issue within an 'insecurity conceptual system' entails presenting it in relation to:

a) Ideas of threat, risk and danger (X is a threat)
b) Ideas of defense and preservation, thus capturing insecurity indirectly through an emphasis on protection (Y should be protected from X)
c) Ideas of crisis, precarity and uncertainty (X is a source of uncertainty, instability)
d) Feelings of fear and anxiety (X is worrying, alarming).

In the data collection phase, I will use this typology of insecurity-framing to identify and extract the variety of themes that are narrated by populist leaders as matters of insecurity. This

will allow us, first, to answer the question of what issues are framed as sources of contemporary insecurity and second, to determine what emotions are mobilized in these narratives.

In the following sections, I will discuss why we can consider insecurity an emotional experience and how we can trace the emotional potential of insecurity narratives.

Populist insecurity narratives beyond fear

Communicating insecurity is an emotional process, given the primordial association of fear and anxiety with issues of danger, risk and threat (Van Rythoven 2015). The emotional dimension is also increasingly studied in relation to populist narratives, although this scholarship is still in its infancy (Demertzis 2019). Bringing together these literatures can thus offer novel ways to understand the affective power of populist insecurity narratives, especially beyond the common association with appeals to fear (Wodak 2015). To this extent, I consider three other emotions that different literatures have linked to populist discourse: anger (Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese 2017; Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2017), pride (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2017; Taş 2020) and hope (Capelos and Demertzis 2018; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014). Below I discuss how such aversive and positive affectivity can relate to insecurity.

First, research linking populism and contemporary insecurity has highlighted how anger can be an expression of insecurity. As Salmela and von Scheve (2017, 2018) argue, anger can become the explicit reaction to some intimate insecurities that characterize advanced societies, such as the competition over jobs, the perceived dilution of one's identity or the fear of losing status and privileges. Rather than blaming or acknowledging personal failures, which would be intra-psychically painful for the self, the individual experiences these vulnerabilities as anger towards 'others' who are to blame (ibid.). Demertzis (2019) similarly points out a connection between insecurity and anger in populism, arguing that at the very basis of blame attributions towards political elites is the feeling of an uncertain and threatening present. Overall populist rhetoric portraying foreigners as parasites or emphasizing the failure of elites to protect and care for citizens, encourages this deflection of anger towards targeted 'enemies' (Salmela and von Scheve 2017, 2018), evidencing how the experience of insecurity can be linked not only to fear and anxiety over threats, but also to anger against those who interfere with the individual's own need for security.

In addition to negative affectivity, positive emotionality can be linked to the experience of insecurity because, while appealing to anger or fear against enemies and dangers, insecurity narratives can also simultaneously channel a positive sense of unity to tackle the threat (Bonansinga 2019; Homolar and Scholz 2019). As with anger deflection, pride could similarly help the individual avoid feelings of self-victimization. Pride shifts attention from the 'danger' to the qualities, strengths and courage of the 'endangered'; emotionally, it sidelines the negative affectivity directed at the threat to refocus attention on the deserved pride one should feel towards the self and the in-group. When populists exalt the people's qualities and courage in face of danger, they essentially contrast the negative experience of insecurity with the positive attributions and achievements of the collective. The populist glorification of the ordinary people's values, virtues and merits, which indeed prompts feelings of pride (Wirz 2018), comforts and symbolically dignifies those who struggle in an insecure and uncertain world (Taş 2020). Crucially, pride can be essential in tackling insecurity given its action-tendencies, as the 'feel-good' power of this emotion generally energizes individuals and instills confidence into taking action (Brader and Marcus 2013). It seems reasonable to expect that, rather than exclusively revolving around enemies and perils, populist narratives of insecurity

also tap into the celebration and triumphs of the ordinary people to project the proud idea that overcoming the threat is possible.

This outlook towards the future, when the threat will be neutralized and security restored, links to the role of hope in insecurity narratives. Hope is generated by the yearning for a better future vis-à-vis difficult circumstances (Lazarus 2001, 2006a). Given the insecurity of the present and the inherent indeterminacy of the future, populist narratives mobilize hope to offer reassuring and comforting stories. As Taş (2020) argues, the populist politics of hope helps citizens compensate for the discrepancy between their positive desires for the future versus the grim reality they experience in the present. These stories very often revolve around the charismatic, exceptional and strong personality of the populist leader: by projecting an image of the leader as a 'savior' (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008), a 'superhero' (Schneiker 2020) or a 'champion' (Bracciale and Martella 2017), capable alone to triumph over the 'enemies of the people', populist narratives evoke the idea that better days are within reach. Hope is therefore inevitably tied to experiences of insecurity because it becomes a crucial instrument to overcome anxiety in the present and provide an imaginary of greater certainty in the future.

Moving beyond the assumption that insecurity can exclusively be linked to emotions of fear and anxiety, this paper disentangles the relationship between populism, insecurity and emotions looking at this set of both negative and positive emotions conveyed in populist insecurity narratives (the so-called, supply-side approach). Identifying the emotional content of populist insecurity communication is vital to understand not only how these leading actors help citizens make sense of contemporary insecurity but also how they perform 'emotional governance' (Richards 2013) by addressing and responding to the wide range of insecurities usually linked to populist support.

Capturing implicit appeals: a narrative approach to emotions

Tracing emotions in content is standard practice for political communication research interested in the expressive aspect of emotions (Crigler and Just 2012). As the literature shows, messages can be 'explicitly' emotional when they contain emotional expressions (Johnstone and Scherer 2000) or 'intrinsically' emotional when they elicit emotions through appraisal processes (Lazarus 2001; Nabi 2003). Rather than relying on quantitative analyses of the incident of emotion-related words, I here focus on capturing implicit emotional appeals. This is important because communicators do not necessarily need to spell emotion words to elicit a reaction in the audience; quantitative analyses of word frequencies can therefore only offer a part of the story.

Implicit emotions have been mostly considered in the news framing literature, which has demonstrated that frames without direct emotional appeals are still very successful in eliciting emotional responses (e.g. Kühne and Schemer 2015; Lecheler, Bos, and Vliegenthart 2015; Lecheler, Schuck, and De Vreese 2013; Nabi 1999, 2003). While this literature tests the *effects* of emotional framing on attitudes and opinions, I here suggest extending their insights to the study of populist insecurity discourse with the aim to capture its latent potential emotional *content*. To do so I infer emotional appeals based on the themes that research has theorized and empirically proven to drive specific emotional reactions, better known as core relational themes (CRTs). The CRT of a given emotion 'is its cognitive-motivational essence, which is shared by anyone experiencing that emotion' (Lazarus 2006a, 207–208). In other words, a CRT is the prototypical script associated with an emotional experience and as Lazarus specifies, 'although each particular instance of an emotion varies in detail, depending on person characteristics (…) and on the social

or physical environmental conditions (…), a prototypical version portrays how the emotion is typically aroused in most or all persons who experience the emotion' (207).

To trace CRTs in texts, I approach the study of insecurity narratives from an emotion narrative perspective, that is, as 'a dramatic plot or story that describes the provocation of the emotion and its background' (Lazarus 2006a, 205). Analyzing CRTs entails identifying the objective features of the discursive setting that have the potential to arouse certain emotions in the audience because they tap into necessary components of a specific emotion script. Hence this approach allows us to study the intrinsic emotional features and affective potential of populist insecurity discourse. While CRTs contain three key elements (elicitors, appraisals and action tendencies - Campos et al. 2013), tracing CRTs in written texts tackles the identification of elicitors only, as the *actual* arousal of the emotion depends on the appraisal that the individual makes of the discursive cues. In other words, texts are treated as a snapshot to single out the emotions they can potentially elicit in recipient audiences. This follows Lecheler, Bos, and Vliegenthart's (2015) broad suggestion to dissect the content of frames to predict their emotional character.

Since the focus of this study is the emotional experience associated with contemporary insecurity, I have selected a set of both positive and negative emotions that, as shown in the earlier section, can be theoretically linked to narratives of insecurity: anxiety, fear, anger, pride and hope. The CRTs listed in Table 1 show the defining feature of the emotion narrative that is essential to the arousal of that given emotion.

Anger emerges when the achievement of goals is challenged or impeded. Its CRT is the presence of an unfair interference with such goals that can be linked to the intentional actions of an agent (Lazarus 2006a; Smith and Ellsworth 1985).

Anxiety and fear[2] share a CRT of danger.[3] These emotions are elicited by stimuli with threatening potential which, more specifically, arouse anxiety in the case of vague, diffuse or uncertain threats, and fear in case of dangers that are more immediately and clearly identifiable (Lazarus 2006a).

Pride is the emotion triggered by the evaluation of positive achievements (Smith and Ellsworth 1985). Conditions for its arousal include the perception or recognition of a positive performance for the self or the in-group.

Finally, *hope* is provoked by a threatening or uncertain situation for which a better outcome is desired (Lazarus 2006a). Its CRT relies on a prospective orientation in which uncertainty in the present and desire for better in the future intertwine.

Methodology

To study insecurity narratives and their emotional fabric, I carried out a qualitative content analysis in the context of the 2017 French presidential election. France offers a

Table 1. Core relational themes for selected insecurity-related emotions.

Anger	A demeaning offense against me and mine.
Anxiety-fear	Facing uncertain, existential threat or an immediate, concrete and overwhelming physical danger.
Pride	Enhancement of one's ego-identity by taking credit for a valued object or achievement, either one's own or that of someone or group with whom we identify.
Hope	Fearing the worst but yearning for better, and believing a favorable outcome is possible.

Adapted from Lazarus (2001, 64)

particularly instructive case study for populism research (Ivaldi 2018a, 2018b; Shields 2021) because it is one of the rare cases in Europe in which two successful and ideologically divergent populisms coexist. On the one hand, Marine Le Pen and her *Rassemblement National* (formerly, Front National) are considered a prototypical example of exclusionary and radical right populism (Ivaldi 2018a; 2018b). On the left side of the spectrum, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party *La France Insoumise* are now widely established in the literature as an expression of left-wing and inclusionary populism (Cautrès 2017; Chiocchetti 2020; Hamburger 2018; Marlière 2019).

The case of the 2017 French presidential election allows us to project the study of insecurity narratives to a context where insecurity was particularly salient, at both the macro and micro levels. Insecurity was relevant first of all at the structural level, as the country has witnessed 'a decade of weak economic growth that has not allowed to reduce neither unemployment nor public debt', where 'the reduction of social mobility - which goes hand in hand with the relative aging of the population -, the territorial concentration of social difficulties and the financial pressure on the majority of households reinforce disenchantment (…) and constantly increases the anxiety for the future' (Wormser 2017, 4). Second, insecurity was relevant at the individual level: while the fear of crime has remained quite stable in national statistics since the 1990s, other security concerns have been steadily on the rise (Robert and Zauberman 2018). This is the case for poverty and unemployment, which are reported as the most concerning issues for French society since 2001, and for terrorism, which witnessed a steep increase starting from 2014. Later, the refugee crisis (and the xenophobic surge it aroused) 'helped merging the fear of the criminal and that of the terrorist in the fear of the immigrant' (ibid., p. 4). The election of 2017 was therefore in a context of multiple crises with an important underpinning of insecurity and uncertainty, from economic concerns to societal fears and the place of France within the EU.

I conducted a content analysis on a random selection of speeches by party leaders in the six weeks preceding the 2017 French presidential election (March-April, N = 10; for speech details, see: Annex). I chose speeches because they are externally-aimed communication (Mudde 2000), indeed crafted to showcase and particularly detail the vision of the actor on the issues at hand. Coding took place in two phases using the NVivo 12 software, with coding categories predetermined based on available theory. In the first phase, I read the texts and coded for (in)security occurrences based on the typology of insecurity-framing presented earlier. This was done to determine the themes framed within an insecurity conceptual system. To ensure that the emotion-coding would take place with exclusive reference to insecurity themes, only the passages containing such themes were retained for phase two. In this phase, I coded for the CRTs of four emotions (anger, anxiety-fear, hope, pride), following the checklist approach suggested by Lazarus (2006a). Checklists were built to capture and closely reflect each CRT definition (see Table 2), thus directing the coder systematically towards what to look for in the emotion narratives.

A crisis of insecurity? Perspectives from exclusionary and inclusionary populism

The typology of insecurity-framing allowed for the identification of insecurity themes, that is the topics that are framed as sources of threat, uncertainty, anxiety or as warranting protection. Since the aim of this article is to study narratives and their emotion-eliciting potential, I here focus on the themes that have been extracted through the analytical frames rather than the frames themselves. This identification phase yielded two main findings.

Table 2. A methodological checklist for tracing prototypical elements in emotion narratives.

Emotion	Checklist
Anger	• Unfair action to the self or interference with its goals • Assignment of blame for the offense
Anxiety-fear	• Threat, risk or prospective of harm
Hope	• Unfavorable situation • Positive outcome is sought
Pride	• Ego and identity enhancement (credit-taking, praise) • Positive achievement

Adapted from Lazarus (2006a)

First, a wide variety of topics are framed within an insecurity conceptual system and this follows an ideological line. In the Rassemblement National perspective, insecurity is 'chronic', 'exploding', 'progressing' and 'rotting everything', as Marine Le Pen states on several occasions; but while the phenomenon is narrated as multifaceted and affecting nearly every sector of society, physical violence (terrorism and crime) and cultural threats (multiculturalism and immigration) are particularly salient. For the leader of La France Insoumise too, contemporary insecurity is a multifaceted phenomenon that affects people's lives in their totality, but socio-collective threats such as climate change, international (in)security and the dangers of capitalist competition appearing more recurrently.

Second, and in line with their Euroscepticism, both populist actors identify the European Union (EU) as the main source and/or accelerator of contemporary insecurity, which is said to affect not only French people but all European citizens. For Le Pen, insecurity starts first and foremost with globalization, a 'process that destroys and crushes people (…), lays out the disappearance of species, the depletion of land, the destruction of ecosystems starting with human ecosystems, which are the nations' (Le Pen, 2 April). While globalization, 'through its corollary - immigration, is first of all a threat of dilution to our national identity' (Le Pen, 19 April), the phenomenon is 'accentuated by the EU, a real Trojan horse of this globalist ideology' (Le Pen, 2 April). The EU is portrayed as a 'dangerous' entity with 'totalitarian drifts' whose potential equipment with an army would 'constitute an intolerable threat to the fundamental freedoms of the peoples of Europe' (Le Pen, 11 March). Its common currency, the Euro, is posed as a major source of economic insecurity, that 'collapsed our industrial production, (…) nearly destroyed a million industrial jobs in 15 years, which has thrown so many workers into unemployment. (…) It's the euro that weakens us and will end up killing the French economy if we don't get out of it' (Le Pen, 16 March). Through its open borders, the EU also 'dispossesses' the French of their territory and constitutes 'yet another danger' because it 'sees itself as limitless while maintaining a principle of generalized free movement' (Le Pen, 17 April).

Similarly, Mélenchon identifies the EU as an accelerator of insecurity. This is because the EU is considered part of an 'intrinsically evil' system that pits one against the other in extreme competition, forcing a logic of social confrontation (Mélenchon, 18 April). In his view, the EU is a major creator of socio-economic conflict because, by making any forms of social and fiscal harmonization impossible, it simply incites all nations 'to the blindest nationalisms and the most absurd xenophobias' (Mélenchon, 18 March). Competition is

not the only factor that creates a reality of tensions in the EU, 'within and between peoples'; the EU also poses a fundamental threat to its own existence because its external frontiers 'have been opened to all directions and we don't know of any organism that survives when it is open to everything' (Mélenchon, 18 April). Finally, similarly to Le Pen, the leader of La France Insoumise frames the debate on European defense as a source of insecurity that would engineer the dangerous and uncontrolled chains of events that have characterized the continent's past centuries (Mélenchon, 18 March).

While the identification of insecurity themes follows the host-ideology line, both populists overlap in the overarching theme that the EU is ultimately responsible. This is in line with the literature evidencing the populist engagement with practices of blame attribution (Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese 2017; Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou, and Exadaktylos 2014), showing however how these can extend to heightened forms leading to processes of 'enemification'.

The eliciting potential of populist insecurity narratives

In what follows, I present an overview of the role of four key emotions in these narratives. Each emotion can be associated with a distinct moment and function of the narrative. While anxiety-fear appears in relation to the presentation of the danger, anger and pride can be traced during the delineation of the main characters, when the populist communicator denounces who is to blame and praises the qualities of the victimized people. Finally, hope appeals appear at the end of the story when the unfavorable situation is seized to commit to action that will restore security in the future. This preliminary evidence is important because it challenges the widespread assumption that fear is the insecurity-emotion par excellence. On the contrary, rather than considering narratives of insecurity as monolithic experiences of fear, we should recognize their potential to elicit a complex mix of both negative and positive emotions in receiving audiences.

Anxiety-fear

Anxiety and fear, which are here treated in conjunction because of their shared relational themes, are the obvious emotional appeals associated with discourses of insecurity. This is because the framing of certain phenomena as posing particular threats necessarily taps into the same ideas of danger and peril that constitute the CRT of this emotional experience.

In line with the broadened understanding of security proposed by constructivist scholars (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998), the threats identified in the two candidates' discourse are of highly variegated character. Le Pen depicts a France that risks disappearing in a 'post-national magma', anxious about 'widespread, generalized, mass' unemployment, plagued by crime, terrorism and urban violence, thus directing anxiety-fear towards sources of cultural, economic and physical insecurity by tapping on these respective security domains. Also for Mélenchon, there is plenty at risk in France, Europe and the world: peace and borders are under question from the 'threat of a generalized war', human civilization is 'on the brink of extinction', trade agreements are leaving 'nothing but destruction' behind and the 'uberization' of society is 'rotting people's lives'. On several occasions, Mélenchon directly calls upon French people arguing that they 'should be afraid', because '[the elites'] whole system is based on fear, (…) they get into your head and you get used to the idea that you have to put up with them and that it's okay to put up with them, (…) they hold on to us by fear' (Mélenchon, 17 April). The system is also portrayed as structurally 'dangerous' and 'threatening', and thus a

source of political insecurity, because it concentrates all power in the hand of a 'tyrant' or 'presidential monarch' (Mélenchon, 18 March). Hence, his vision of contemporary insecurity channels anxieties towards a number of threats, most notably in the political, military, environmental and societal sectors.

In addition to appealing to a number of dangers and perils, in these narratives anxiety and fear are also particularly primed with processes of discursive intensification, involving the listing and detailing of the presumed threats. This is clearly exemplified by Le Pen's interpretation of the causes and effects of immigration:

> Behind massive immigration, there are costs and social sinking (…) Behind massive immigration, there is delinquency. Behind massive immigration, there is Islamism. Behind massive immigration, there is terrorism (…) There is the immediate threat - the transformation of our country - and then there is the threat over time: the questioning of our values, our model of civilization, our customs, our landscapes, our traditions, in other words, the questioning of our identity as a people. (Le Pen, 17 April)

Similarly, Mélenchon presents a precarious situation for geopolitical security with mounting tension:

> Peace is a precious good that must be cherished and protected. In Europe, and around the world, wars are spreading, weapons are being piled up, the tensions of domination are exacerbating on all seas, on all continents. Aggressive leaders are facing one another (…) We must not accept that Europe re-enters the race with defense, because a Europe of defense is a Europe of war. (Mélenchon, 18 March)

Anxiety-fear appeals perform an important function in the process of emotional governance. By appearing right at the start of a narrative, they set the stage for what is to be understood as a source of insecurity. This is a crucial step in sense-making: as securitization scholars have shown, the evolution of our understanding of security has produced a plethora of phenomena that can be perceived and socially constructed as threatening. This applies both to *issues* (for instance, climate change and HIV - Schäfer, Scheffran, and Penniket 2016; Sjöstedt 2008) and *people* (migrants or Roma minorities are prominent examples in this regard - Huysmans 2000). As Béland (2019) argues, at the heart of the populist politics of insecurity is the framing of *perceived* threats. Béland is right in pointing out the perceptual nature of the threat that populists articulate to their publics; by doing so he reminds us that the status of threat attributed through processes of insecurity framing may and may not be necessarily objective.

What constitutes contemporary insecurity is thus not clear-cut; appeals to anxiety-fear constitute important cues on what citizens may *come to see* as threats and dangers. In emotional regulation terms, they direct audiences towards the phenomena or actors that according to the speaker constitute sources of insecurity and need to be considered with a special alert.

Anger

Interestingly, discourses of insecurity do not necessarily appeal to anxiety-fear only. The analysis shows that after introducing the source of insecurity, the populist actors under examination here immediately shift attention to two key elements of the story, which are central elicitors of anger: the unfair character of the danger and the dismissive, negligent or even irresponsible behavior of those who are to blame (Lazarus 2006a; Smith and

Ellsworth 1985). Both Le Pen and Mélenchon emphasize these at length throughout their narratives, similarly highlighting the 'intentionality' behind the production of insecurity.

A notable instance is the quote below by Marine Le Pen, which shows how anger cues can supersede fear appeals:

> Chronic insecurity, which our leaders don't care about, which my competitors in this election don't care about and never speak about, is however the daily reality for millions of French people (…) Oh, it's not Mr. Ladreit de Lacharrière or Mr. Bergé who are suffering from insecurity. But the French themselves, they live it! They suffer from it! We would like the French to get used to it and live so intimately with insecurity that they forget about it. The government, sometimes helped by the media, is behind this oversight: denying the reality, minimizing the facts - even the most serious - not hesitating to hide them when it can. (Le Pen, 11 March)

In this narrative attempt, Le Pen has the potential to elicit anger rather than fear because she frames insecurity as the 'unfair' experience of the many - not the few, and as the deliberate product of the elites in power, who are 'behind' attempts to manipulate the French into becoming oblivious to their own vulnerabilities.

As Mélenchon's discourse is centered around inequalities and injustice (Chiocchetti 2020), his narratives of insecurity are even more substantially underpinned by this sense of unfairness towards the 'ordinary people'. Regardless of the issues he frames as threats, the presentation of these sources of modern anxieties is immediately followed by a denunciation of 'the scandal happening under everyone's eyes' that these insecurities represent. This rhetorical strategy produces two results: first, it shifts attention from the experience of insecurity to its origins; second, it serves to pinpoint 'culprits' who are directly responsible for producing the current state of affairs. In Mélenchon's narratives, this can always be traced to a 'perverse and evil system' to blame. As Gerstlé and Nai (2019) confirm, La France Insoumise's leader ranked the highest in the use of anti-elitism appeals during the 2017 campaign. At the national level, the 'system' takes the form of politicians who are presented as a 'golden caste of incapable, useless parasites' (Mélenchon, 9 April) that does not care about any of the people's main concerns: in Mélenchon's words, they 'never talk about [them] - the only thing they talk about is money' (Mélenchon, 18 April). According to the leader of La France Insoumise, the system dangerously and intentionally keeps French citizens in relations of dependence and economic insecurity to control them (Mélenchon, 17 April). At the supranational level, the evil system is represented by the EU, whose illegitimacy is underscored especially in relation to the idea of sovereignty-deprivation: as Mélenchon puts it, the EU 'takes popular sovereignty away and subjugates the people to the sovereignty of money' (18 March). Finally, at the international level, the system takes the form of an 'extremely aggressive NATO' (considered 'fatal', 'disastrous' and an 'upholder of war and disorder'; Mélenchon, 9 April); the US (regarded as 'the most dangerous power' and as 'intrinsically violent'; Mélenchon, 31 March; 17 April); finally 'violent leaders' (both inside and outside the nation) whose abilities to 'deceive everyone' and take 'decisions for short-term interests' are directly opposed to the price and consequences the ordinary people 'keep on paying' (Mélenchon, 31 March).

Anger can thus have a distinct and important role in the narration of insecurity, as the delineation of enemies through practices of blame attribution follows a logic that markedly underpins the core relation theme of this emotion. The interpretation cue suggested by anger appeals gives center stage to the idea that insecurity is the product of intentional

and blatant wrongdoing, in this case perpetrated by elites, and by doing so reduces the complexity of contemporary uncertainty to the actions of specific individuals. With anger appeals, populist leaders respond to citizens' feelings of insecurity by redirecting them to targeted enemies, as well as by providing linear interpretations that can help audiences make sense of their present circumstances.

Pride

Rather counterintuitively, the narration of contemporary insecurity can also display appeals of positive emotionality. This is the case of pride, the emotion linked to the acknowledgment of positive characteristics and achievements (Lazarus 2006a). The narratives under examination here show a pattern of juxtaposition, in which the unfairness of the insecurity experience seen earlier is paired, in sharp contrast, with the praise of the main victim - the people.

The praise takes two forms. It can highlight the people's positive traits and their worth, as opposed to the overwhelming threat they are facing, as in the following example:

> The Old Continent, which is the richest in the world, which has the most scientists, the most technicians, the most highly skilled workers, will be able to take its share of the task that falls on humanity, which is to reverse the destruction of the ecosystem, of climate change, of the disappearance of species. (Mélenchon, 18 April).

In this passage, Mélenchon uses climate change, a threat of such global nature that may leave people feel powerless, to remind his public that Europe 'has all it needs' to engage in the fight, hence mobilizing pride through the exaltation of the in-group's positive characteristics. He similarly channeled a sense of pride when contrasting the catastrophe of the Paris terrorist attacks to 'the strengths' shown by the French people in that occasion, which 'overcame everything' and made sure that terrorists tried 'in vain' to terrorize and divide (Mélenchon, 18 March).

Appeals to the virtues and the qualities of the 'endangered' people can also be made in direct and specific contrast to an enemy, as shown in the quote below, in which Le Pen provides an articulate list of French qualities when discussing the cultural threat posed by the Muslim 'Other'':

> In France, we respect women, we don't call them out in the street with rude, outrageous words, we don't ban them from public space, we don't hit them, we don't ask them to hide under veils because they would be impure; they are not forbidden to dress as they want to, they are not legally relegated. (…) In France, we drink wine if we want to, we think and express ourselves freely, we hear the bell ring in the distance but we are entitled to criticize or change religion without being afraid. (Le Pen, 17 April).

In Le Pen's communication, appeals to pride also take the form of references to the common characteristics of proud behavior, as widely shared in popular culture. This can be seen in this image she evokes when appealing to a 'France which stands on its feet without trembling, a France which imposes itself without submitting. A France that does not look down, a France that does not bow to anyone' (Le Pen, 11 March).

I argue that these pride appeals serve two key functions. On the one hand, by positing a 'good' and 'virtuous' people against an 'evil' enemy, pride appeals *moralize* the experience of insecurity. In other words, praising the virtues of the endangered people activates an 'undeserving' frame that evidences the unfairness of insecurity for the ordinary people, who are just

'too good' to deserve living in such a state of precarity and uncertainty. This can further amplify the anger prompted by blame attribution practices because it shifts the attention once again to those who are ultimately responsible for these nefarious consequences.

On the other hand, appeals to pride serve a re-energizing function as the people are reminded of their qualities, strengths and achievements, in a call to avoid resignation. This usually takes the form of celebratory remarks that highlight the people's courage, talent and strong spirit, as well as the country's greatness, its historic heritage and position in the world. The narrative that populist actors promote when appealing to pride in discourses of insecurity is that, if the people are too good to deserve bearing the consequences of the elites' failures, they are also good enough to fight back. Hymans (2006) suggests that when strengths, qualities or position in the world are emphasized by political leaders in times of crisis, such pride appeals contribute to activating the 'fight' response to threat perception (as opposed to 'flight'). Pride appeals indeed energize audiences because, by emphasizing their positive attributes and capabilities, they remind them to have faith in their power and generate the mental resources for engaging in goal-seeking action (Brader and Marcus 2013).

Hope

Hope is an emotion that denotes the desire for a better outcome in the future despite a rather unfavorable present (Lazarus 2006a). In narratives of insecurity, appeals to hope are found most consistently in relation to actions to address insecurity. The main difference between the actors under examination here is the directionality of such actions: while for Mélenchon security is achieved moving *forward*, for Le Pen it is rather *restored*.

In a country that 'threatens to fall down', caught between 'the extreme right that desires an ethnic nation and the servants of King Money that endlessly want to destroy the State and public services', Mélenchon seizes an insecure present to 'propose a positive way out that our ballot paper represents. A way out from the impasse where dizzy leaders imprisoned us for at least ten years' (Mélenchon, 18 March). He also refers to hope explicitly by positing his party and supporters as 'the luminous hope of upcoming better days', contrasting the ideal of a positive future against the social and economic sufferance of the present, embodied by a 'sickening world in which some accumulate wealth on the endless distress of others' (Mélenchon, 18 March).

In contrast to actions moving forward, Le Pen's narratives rely on actions of clear restorative character. When seeking better outcomes for the future (i.e. the CRT of hope), Le Pen makes predominant use of verbs such as 'give back', 'take back', 'find again' or 'make again', that ground future action in an act of continuity with the past. In her narrative, the achievement of security in the future rests on French people's willingness to 'regain' national unity, 'rebuild' the economy and 'take back' the reins of the country (Le Pen, 16 March), hence finding hope in a comforting past that neutralizes contemporary insecurity. Once this is achieved, 'Fear will change sides. Respect will return. Peace will return. Tranquility will return' (Le Pen, 17 April).

Hope appeals in populist discourse thus intertwine with appeals to the past, whose use in populist narratives has been highlighted as a powerful mechanism to generate a sense of control and feasibility (Bonansinga 2019; Taggart 2004). But they also link to the future, as they address feelings of insecurity in the present by emphasizing what Kinnvall (2018) calls the 'security of becoming': as the author argues, individuals are not only driven by a need to feel ontologically secure in their present circumstances but also in relation to an

imagined future. Hope appeals, with their focus on the desire for a better future, can speak rather directly to the psychological need to assure safety in the long term.

Moreover, populist hope appeals perform a 'politics of reassurance' (Homolar and Scholz 2019) because, after telling the people what is wrong with the state of society and who is responsible for generating pervasive insecurity, populist leaders offer a positive outlook towards the future grounded in the reassurance of security attainment/restoration. The way out of the insecurity crisis is personified in the populist actor, who self-characterizes as a strong leader, arguing that his/her exceptional qualities are precisely what the country needs in a state of crisis. Hence hope appeals prompt comforting ideas of restoration, protection and guidance in the audience that can alleviate the sense of insecurity and rally support for the populist agenda.

Conclusion

Starting from the assumption that contemporary insecurity is a complex phenomenon that is neither immediately nor necessarily intelligible, this article has argued that the emotion narratives leaders put forward play an important role in the ways citizens make sense of their (in)security environment. The article has looked specifically at populist leaders, as the literature points at the perception and narration of insecurity as key factors for their increasing success across Europe.

The analysis provided preliminary empirical evidence to start questioning two widespread assumptions in the literature. First, it showed that, far from exclusive discourses of fears, populist narratives of insecurity in the French context consistently appeal to anger while also coexisting with positive appeals to hope and pride. Understanding that populist communication is far from a monolithic emotional experience and entails complex appeals is a first step for future research to test the differential effects of these emotions on attitudes and opinions on security in Europe. Emotions can have important implications for the processing of information about security that may increase the resonance and approval of populist securitization narratives among citizens (see Bonansinga 2019).

Second, it showed that not only exclusionary but also inclusionary populists place emphasis on insecurity in their narratives. While ideological differences drive the divergent identification of security threats, both Le Pen and Mélenchon campaigned on a number of issues that, regardless of the left-right divide, were similarly framed within the lenses of insecurity. In other words, while the content of the issues at stake follows host-ideological lines (i.e. cultural threats for Le Pen and socio-economic threats for Mélenchon), it is the populism they have in common that determines the overarching themes that 'citizens are in danger' and 'national and supranational elites are the main drivers of this insecurity'. This advances a hypothesis for future testing that, as with the concept of crisis (Moffitt 2015), also the concept of insecurity has peripheral importance in the ideological structure of populism. This implies a systematic comparison between varieties of populism and non-populist actors.

This study has several limitations. The rather small sample of speeches considered is useful to spotlight the problematic assumptions in the literature that the article aimed to question - namely that the populist construction of insecurity is a prerogative of exclusionary variants and is almost exclusively underpinned by appeals to fear and anxiety. However, future studies should expand their samples to study latent emotional content more systematically and as applied to a larger variety of populist cases. Moreover, although the article takes into account several emotions, future research should expand

the analytical toolkit to other emotions that relate to insecurity narratives, such as hate, empathy, compassion or nostalgia (see e.g. Szabó and Balázs 2021).

Overall the article makes three important contributions. First, by mapping how different emotional appeals relate to these narratives, it illustrates how populists perform emotional governance, and more specifically how they regulate public emotions towards threats to fear, enemies to blame, an in-group to be proud of and actions to be met with a hopeful outlook. Second, it shows that the dynamics of insecurity framing are important discursive features of both exclusionary *and inclusionary* populists. As the actors under consideration are considered archetypal examples of right and left populism and the themes that have emerged here are consistent with the political offer that the literature associates with these varieties of populism, insights from the French case are applicable for further testing on other populist actors. Finally, by studying implicit emotional appeals through the methodological use of core relational themes, the article combines interdisciplinary insights (from psychology, sociology and communication research) to suggest a complementary qualitative strategy to the study of emotions in populist communication. A qualitative approach, although limited in the generalization of its results, can offer important insights into the holistic experience of emotions. By focusing on CRTs, it allows to consider the context in which emotion sentences are used, which is usually left behind in quantitative studies that focus on emotion-laden words. A qualitative research strategy thus stresses that any emotion evoked in communication should be considered in its totality rather than as the sum of emotions conveyed by single words.

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Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. Because of their position along the socio-cultural cleavage, these actors are also referred to in the literature as respectively left and right populists and I will here use the terms interchangeably.
2. For coherence in terminology, I use the term ‘fear’ instead of Lazarus’ (2001, 2006a) ‘fright’; both terms share the same appraisal patterns and can be used interchangeably (Nabi 2003).
3. Since my aim is to capture discursive features that elicit emotions, I present anxiety and fear as a merged category because of their similar antecedent concerning issues of danger.

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Appendix: Details of speeches under examination*

	Date	Location	Words	Words (Total)
Marine Le Pen	11.03.2017	Chateauroux	6885	
	16.03.2017	Saint-Rapheal	7856	
	02.04.2017	Bordeaux	5944	
	17.04.2017	Paris	9018	
	19.04.2017	Marseille	9168	38,871
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	18.03.2017	Paris	5657	
	31.03.2017	IRIS Institute	9450	
	09.04.2017	Marseille	5065	
	17.04.2017	Ile de France	7094	
	18.04.2017	Dijon	11,683	38,949

* Average speech length: Mélenchon: 63 min, Le Pen: 65 min.