

THE ROLE OF (IN)SECURITY IN THE NARRATIVES OF THE POPULIST
RADICAL LEFT. THE CASE OF JEAN-LUC MELENCHON AND LA
FRANCE INSOUMISE (2017-2020)

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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February 2023

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Abstract

This research investigates how and to what extent the European populist radical left (PRL) engages with the 'politics of (in)security'. It aims to disentangle the link between insecurity and populism that the existing literature has mostly substantiated with empirical cases centring on the populist radical right. By focusing on the 'less likely scenario' of the PRL (given the left's traditional 'discomfort' with security), the thesis argues that insecurity is a key dimension of the populist ideology that structures how populists conceive the struggle people vs elites, that is, as a *relationship of insecurity* where the people are *in danger* and the elites are *the danger*.

This thesis brings together elements of different literatures - from political science to international relations and political psychology studies - to offer a multidisciplinary take on how (in)security can be integrated in populist communication. Empirically, the thesis focuses on the case of French populist radical left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, *La France Insoumise* (LFI), to answer two key questions: (RQ1) How do political parties and leaders espousing radical left populism interpret and communicate (i.e., *frame*) (in)security in their external communication? Are their (in)security narratives predominantly shaped by populist ideas or their radical left ideology? (RQ2) Why does the populist radical left engage with the politics of insecurity (if this is widely associated with their - often loathed - radical right competitor)? Is it a matter of ideas or strategy?

To answer the first question, the project looks at the so-called 'supply side' of populist politics, carrying out an extensive content analysis of the party's and its leader's communication (including blogs, editorials, tweets and videos from Mélenchon's YouTube channel) in the period 2017-2020. This communication study

also offers a qualitative analysis to reconstruct the overarching *story* that Mélenchon and LFI use to interpret and make sense of contemporary insecurity. To answer the second research question, the project turns to expert interviews with academics specialising in Mélenchon and LFI and generally close to the party. This second study helps further disentangle what (in)security means for Mélenchon and LFI, and unpack the role that strategies and ideas can play in understanding the engagement with the politics of insecurity.

Overall this research offers four contributions to the literature on populism. The first contribution is developed by demonstrating that insecurity is a key ideational resource that different populists can use to articulate the struggle ‘people vs. elite’, and hence by proposing an important hypothesis for testing to what extent insecurity can be considered a core concept in the populist ideological structure. The second contribution is developed by providing an extensive account of how the *populist* features and *left* positioning of Mélenchon and LFI come together to shape their narratives on the state of insecurity in contemporary societies, hence broadening our understanding of the populist radical left and ensuring an accumulation of knowledge on a case that has been comparatively less studied than its radical right counterpart in Europe. The third contribution is developed by problematising how other populist actors beyond the ‘usual suspects’ of the populist radical right talk about security with their public, hence unpacking the agency of populist actors in interpreting social reality and guiding processes of sense-making. The last contribution is developed by bringing populism studies in conversation with other research traditions most notably in the field of security studies and political psychology, hence adding to the cross-fertilisation between disciplines that is of vital importance to understanding complex real-world phenomena such as populism.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Daniele Albertazzi and Tereza Capelos for believing in me at the start of this journey and for supporting and guiding me throughout. A big *grazie*, in particular, to Daniele for being a true mentor. I am eternally grateful for all the opportunities I had to work with you and contribute to your research. I can confidently say that I have learnt as much from that exposure as I have from my PhD training. I would also like to thank my partner, Orestis, for playing an instrumental role in this research by helping retrieve data from the Twitter API. But more importantly, for being my rock during a very difficult time when I doubted my capacity to see this research through. This thesis is for you. Finally, I am grateful to the academics that gave their time to be part of this study and thankful to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Overview

This research investigates how and to what extent the European populist radical left (PRL) engages with the ‘politics of insecurity’. It aims to disentangle the link between (in)security¹ and populism that the existing literature has mostly substantiated with empirical cases centring on the populist radical right (PRR). By focusing on the ‘less likely scenario’ of the PRL (given the left’s traditional ‘discomfort’ with security), the thesis argues that insecurity is a key dimension of the populist ideology that structures how populists conceive the struggle people vs elites, that is, as a *relationship of insecurity* where the people are *in danger* and the elites are *the danger*. By using a multidisciplinary conceptual framework to capture (in)security in populist discourse, the thesis also shows that the (in)security-talk of populist parties on the left goes well beyond discourses about law and order. Overall this research contributes to the literature on populism by demonstrating the role of insecurity as a key ideational resource for all populists, hence shedding light on what should be considered an additional, core concept of the populist ideological structure. It also contributes to theorising the areas of overlap between different varieties of populism.

This chapter sets the stage for the study by providing the research puzzle, while also defining the key terms, the focus of the research and the literature gaps the thesis aims to address.

¹ The term ‘(in)security’ is used to summarise references to ‘security and insecurity’. For a discussion on this, see next chapter (Literature review, Section 2.3: What is (in)security?)

1.2. The research puzzle

Although not a recent phenomenon, populism has gained track in Europe in the last decade and we have witnessed both an increase in the share of votes for such actors as well as their incremental participation in cabinets, either in government or opposition (Lewis et al. 2018). Populist parties and leaders may position themselves differently across the political spectrum but they share a discursive focus on people-centrism and anti-elitism. Even if scholars disagree on what populism is (e.g., an ideology, a discourse, a strategy - see next session for a discussion), they agree that it pits a homogenous 'people' against a set of inimical elites (Moffitt 2020). As such, there is usually agreement on what parties and leaders should be considered 'populist'.

Many link populist success to the **insecurities** generated by globalisation, as the latter has rendered certain sectors of the population particularly vulnerable: by introducing harsh competition over jobs, augmenting diversity and social tensions, as well as shifting governmental responsibilities to actors outside the state, globalisation is said to have produced economic, cultural and political grievances (Grande and Kriesi 2012). Populism is also linked to insecurity (indirectly) through the concept of crisis: for scholars, **crisis** is an important element to understand populism, because it functions both as a structural facilitator for the resonance of its appeals and as a rhetorical means to construct the moral struggle of the people vs. the elites (Moffitt 2015; Taggart 2004). Crises share a deep connection with insecurity because their narration evokes a shared sense of *threat*, taps into the language of *enemies*, *urgency* and *emergency*, while also signalling a situation of heightened *uncertainties* and *anxieties* (Bubandt 2005; Brassett and Clarke 2012; Capelos and Exadaktylos 2017).

If the crucial keys to understanding populist success somehow revolve around insecurity, it is important to uncover how different populists relate to it. However,

research to date has only revealed half the story, by providing evidence of how *right-wing* populists, in particular, capitalise on insecurity. Indeed, authors have shown how this *subtype* of populists adopts a rhetoric that, by providing a linear account of who is the danger (e.g., the immigrants), who is in danger (e.g., ‘us’) and who is to blame (e.g., the cosmopolitan elites), helps citizens re-order an otherwise ‘chaotic and uncertain’ globalised world (Kinnvall 2014; Wodak 2015; Wojczewski 2020; Homolar and Löfflman 2021; Löfflman 2021).

The present research aims to understand whether the PRL mobilises insecurity in its communication and what it talks about when addressing the topic. As Ulrich Beck (1992, 23) argued in his seminal work on the ‘risk society’, contemporary insecurity is pervasive but often immaterial and not necessarily objective or visible, hence it is “open to social definition and construction”. This means that “all knowledge about it is mediated and as such open to interpretation, (...) and hence political” (Adam and van Loon 2000). All individuals and institutions in key social positions, such as political parties and leaders, can take part in the political contest to define and give legitimacy to some threats while ignoring or sidelining others. As Roxanna Sjöstedt (2013, p. 143-144) argued:

Threat framing by national decision-makers has significant implications for the overall national, and sometimes even international, security context. The prioritization of an issue results in speedier handling, redistributions of resources, media and public attention, policy changes, and, last but not least, a downgrading of other issues due to so-called agenda crowding. It is therefore important to understand why national decision-makers – who are presented with a number of complex situations that, to varying degrees, could be claimed to be national security threats – construct some issues as threats, ignore others, and change these perceptions over time and space.

Since many scholars conceive populism as a ‘thin’ system of beliefs that usually attaches to other, ‘thick’ ideologies (see next section), it is unclear what drives the identification of security threats in ideologically different populists. This links to a wider

open debate in the literature on whether, as Luke March (2017) puts it, ‘populism trumps ideology’ or ‘ideology trumps populism’ (intended as left-right positioning). Some scholars emphasise the similarities among left and right populists and argue that, although their political message is ‘coloured’ by an underlying ideology, they remain essentially ‘the same’ (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2015). Indeed, studies on party competition have recently highlighted a convergence between left and right populists on a variety of themes ranging from economic protectionism to nationalism and the portrayal of the EU as a threat to citizens (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021; Gerbaudo and Screti 2017; Ivaldi 2019; Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods 2017). Other scholars argue that it is the ‘thick’ ideologies attached to thin populism that actually define its very essence (Katsambekis 2017). However, the fact that European PRL is under-studied has made it more difficult to establish the degree of its distinctiveness vis-à-vis the European PRR (March 2017). When it comes to its relationship with (in)security, the empirical evidence is scarce because only limited studies have examined (in)security in left populist narratives (Bonansinga 2022).

To understand what the PRL talks about when they talk about (in)security, we first need to challenge the contradicting associations that the existing literature makes between the ‘politics of insecurity’ - intended as the framing of collective threats (Béland 2020) - and the populist right. While the populist right is linked to the construction of ‘security threats’, the PRL is located in the domain of ‘socio-economic’ crises (Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019). In this thesis, I borrow from a multidisciplinary understanding of ‘security’ which allows us to expand the range of issues examined as ‘security issues’, hence going beyond ideas relating to the ‘immigrant threat’ and ‘law and order’, typical of the PRR security repertoire. This in turn will show how the PRL discusses a number of issues through the lenses of

(in)security. By not reproducing the existing artificial distinctions between the populist right being about 'security issues' and the populist left being about 'socio-economic issues', I argue that we can better understand the role that insecurity discourse plays in all types of populism. Hence problematising the relationship between (in)security and populism allows us to identify similarities and differences between left and right populism.

Having introduced the key aims and starting assumptions of the project, I will first detail the background of this research, by discussing why it is important to research the link between the PRL and (in)security with reference to contemporary European politics. I will then expand on the research gap before continuing with a brief outline of the methodological strategy. Finally, I will present the structure of this work and outline its overall contribution.

1.3. Populism: relevance of the phenomenon and key terms

Populism is a relevant political force in Europe, as shown by indicators of electoral growth, government participation and overall influence across party systems, which I discuss below.

First of all, the electoral growth of these parties, both on the left and on the right, is ascending and their total share of votes has tripled in the last 20 years (Lewis et al. 2018). Furthermore, the percentage of populists in government, either as junior or major partners, has increased from less than 5% in the 1990s to almost 20% in the 2010-18 period (Vittori and Morlino, 2021). Finally, the literature has shown a considerable influence of populist parties in shifting other parties' policy positions and discourse, both on the mainstream right (Mudde 2013) and the mainstream left (Bale

et al. 2010). Even when less successful electorally, populist parties have exercised considerable leverage on mainstream parties, with the push towards holding a British referendum on EU membership used as a prominent example (Bale 2018). This shows that populists can hold considerable power in the ‘framing contest’ at the heart of political discourse.

The increasing relevance of populism has been met with growing academic interest in the essence, causes, manifestations and consequences of this phenomenon (see Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017 for a review). Although a definitional consensus does not exist, scholarly works revolve around a recurrent set of characteristics that populist parties display, most notably the commendation of and appeal to a virtuous ‘ordinary people’ accompanied by a vilification of the corrupt establishment (Mudde 2004; Taggart 2000). Additional accounts have highlighted the charismatic personality of populist parties’ leaders (Meny and Surel 2001), a straightforward and simplified political message similar to demagoguery (Taguieff 2007), a particular mode of party organisation revolving around the leader (Weyland 2001) or a performance of crisis (Moffitt 2015). Such variety of aspects highlighted by the available scholarship is mirrored into a wide range of definitions that see populism as an ideology (Mudde 2004), style (Moffitt and Tormey 2014), discourse (Panizza 2005), logic (Laclau 2005) and organisation mode (Weyland 2001) (see: Chapter 2 - Literature Review, for a discussion).

In line with Cas Mudde (2004: 543) and scholars from the ideational school, I here regard populism as a thin 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”. The ideology is ‘thin’ because it is only

composed of a limited number of core concepts and as such “it lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions” (Stanley 2008: 95).

Empirically, the populist ideology becomes manifested in a set of communication practices that allow for its identification and study (Kriesi 2014); furthermore, being a thin ideology with a restricted core, populism comes attached to other ‘thick’ ideologies that determine its left or right nature (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2011). One of the most established ways to distinguish left and right populists is Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser’s (2013a) ‘inclusionary vs exclusionary’ typology, which builds on three dimensions of symbolic, material and political inclusion/exclusion to pin down the ideological differences between these two competing populisms. Important to note, in Europe left and right populists are especially present in their radical forms: the populist radical right is a special sub-type of right-wing populism that combines the latter with authoritarian and nativist ideological features (Mudde 2007), whereas the populist radical left – the focus of this study - combines populism with a rejection of capitalism and an agenda revolving around social and economic rights (March and Mudde 2005; March and Keith 2016).

1.3.1. The populist radical left (PRL)

The European PRL can be understood through a combination of inclusionary populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013a) and left radicalism (March and Mudde 2005). It represents an instance of inclusionary populism because it defines in rather broad terms (i.e., inclusive) who belongs to ‘the people’, should have access to resources and should prompt political change. These are, respectively, the symbolic, material

and political dimensions that Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013a) suggest to discern these political actors from their right-wing counterparts.

The European PRL is also 'radical' in that "it rejects the underlying socio-economic structure of contemporary capitalism and its values and practices" while being 'left' in its "identification of economic inequality as the basis of existing political and social arrangements, and espousal of collective economic and social rights as their principal agenda" (March and Mudde 2005: 25). Left radicalism is also defined in terms of its internationalist stand, as these parties tend to place themselves within a cross-national network of similar-minded movements and to find the cause of national and regional political issues in structural 'global' processes (ibid.).

The PRL is currently under-theorised in Europe as comparatively more research exists on the PRR. Scholars can rely on an important strand of literature on the Latin American populist left, although many have warned that comparisons cannot be established given the diversity in context and political systems. Overall, the scholarship on Latin American populism has suggested that populists in the continent are visibly more inclusive in the construction of the people, as their boundaries of belonging do not run along nativist lines as with European radical right populists. Although being a positive and emancipatory force from this perspective, Latin American populists have also gravely damaged the liberal checks and balances, causing an authoritarian shift in the region, leading scholars to argue about the threats they pose to liberal democracy (de la Torre 2016; Weyland 2013). For the scholars of European left populism, this argument is not applicable to the European context as the PRL is considered a progressive force that approaches politics as a struggle between adversaries rather than a clash between enemies that need to be eliminated (Mouffe 2018: 91). However, recent studies have challenged this argument providing empirical

evidence that shows left populists such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France relying considerably on enmity narratives to portray elites as fundamental threats to the people (Bonansinga 2022). As the debate remains open, this thesis contributes to shedding more light on the communicative patterns of the PRL to understand them better vis-à-vis the right.

1.4. The focus on (in)security

Why is it important to unpack the relationship between the European PRL and (in)security in particular?

First of all, security is a prominent concern in European politics. The centrality of this concept in Europe can be summarised in the words of Angela Merkel below (in Hegemann and Schneckener 2019, 141):

Europe has not only promised peace, but also security to its citizens. We need to renew this promise. I mean this in the very comprehensive sense, with a view to our fundamental convictions: democracy, rule of law, human dignity, with a view to security from terrorism, with a view to the security of prosperity and jobs, the protection of external borders, the preservation of our cultural identity and the shared environment.

As Hendrik Hegemann and Ulrich Schneckener (2019) argue, the concept of security is so important within the European Union that it is becoming the central notion of a new defining narrative for the EU as a whole: especially following the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, the narrative of a ‘security union’ may be superseding the ‘peace project’ and ‘internal market’ narratives that have cemented European integration since its very early days. The centrality of security at the discursive level is met by a dramatic increase in the salience of insecurity for the European public, as evidenced in Eurobarometer data on citizens’ perceptions since 2015 (Hegemann and

Schneckener 2019, 142-143). This growing salience suggests that issues of security and insecurity play an important part in the ways citizens form opinions and preferences about political parties and leaders. Finally, an increasing body of research converges on their acknowledgement as contributing factors to populist success (Grande and Kriesi 2012; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Kinnvall 2018; see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion).

If security/insecurity are relevant at both the structural and subjective levels, why focus in turn on its communicative aspects? Populist communication is a crucial element that bridges the gap between those structural causes of insecurity that may make populism more relevant at certain points in time and citizens' own understanding of the unfolding events surrounding them. Populist actors, just like any other political agent, do not simply or neutrally communicate with the public; they interpret and structure information thus acting as producers of meaning. In this process, they craft stories that help citizens make sense of complex relationships and events. This becomes relevant in the context of security, because security is not a 'quality' that certain issues display as opposed to others; it is rather an interpretation that we project onto issues. Therefore the examination of political narratives (populist narratives in this case) is pivotal in understanding the meaning that citizens come to attribute to security and insecurity, precisely because the lenses through which we define these notions are blurred. In other words, a study of this type opens a window into the agency of populist actors in shaping public perceptions of what should or should not be understood as a source of insecurity.

Traditionally speaking, security has been associated with the law and order domain in political science and to the use of force in theories of International Relations, but constructivist approaches have challenged such ways of understanding security.

As theorists of the Copenhagen School have argued, the way we define security depends first and foremost on the status of threat attributed to a certain referent object (Buzan et al. 1998). In contemporary politics, the boundaries of the security concept are not clear-cut but rather depend on the power of narratives. Security, in other words, is discursively constructed by representing a particular phenomenon as a harm to a given community, so that the former becomes *securitised*. The issue of migration features prominently in this strand of literature, as it constitutes an excellent example of an issue that decades ago would have been looked at through the lenses of labour or social policy but nowadays is consistently associated with security concerns (Huysmans 2000). The role of narratives thus becomes central in guiding the public understanding of certain issues towards some interpretations rather than others.

1.5. Research gaps

In the case of populism, work on (in)security narratives has been conducted predominantly if not exclusively on the PRR while the PRL - although far from a negligible force in European politics - remains widely under-studied (March 2011). Why is this the case?

Here I identify two potentially interrelated causes. First, there seems to be a normative bias in the perception of the PRR as 'more dangerous', thus requiring a concentration of academic efforts to understand and tackle this 'threat'; the PRL, on the other hand, is often considered by academics a progressive and positive force for European politics, because of its inclusive language and its construction of politics as a struggle between adversaries rather than between enemies (Mouffe 2018). Even among politicians, there is a perception of populism on the left as 'simply misguided'

and not sharing common values with their PRR competitors (see e.g., Shields 2021 for the case of France). A second reason why we know little about (in)security narratives in the PRL is that academics tend to conceive security as relating to the area of 'national security' (hence crime and law and order) inevitably linking the role of insecurities to the radical right, because of their ownership of the theme (Mudde 2010). This extends beyond academia, and this is why we often read newspapers arguing that the left, more generally, has a problem or is uncomfortable with security. For example, not long ago the New York Times (29 December 2021) argued that, in preparation for the 2022 French presidential campaign, "the left has found itself voiceless on issues like security", with the term precisely intended as discussions around crime.

Following on from these analytical gaps, it is worth challenging the way we currently understand the relationship between the PRL and (in)security. Tackling the issue from a constructivist perspective introduces some innovations and advantages: first, it allows us to finally go beyond the traditional 'law and order' category to explore how the PRL understands contemporary (in)security; second, it provides us with a framework for the comparative analysis of where left and right populist narratives may overlap or diverge in interpreting and articulating the current insecurity scenarios for the public.

1.6. Research questions, case study and methods

To address these research gaps, this project starts off with a descriptive research question. This is because the European PRL is understudied, hence it is imperative

to first gather information on the ways it articulates (in)security issues. This question asks:

RQ1: How do political parties and leaders espousing radical left populism interpret and communicate (i.e., *frame*) (in)security in their external communication?

- RQ1.1: Are their (in)security narratives predominantly shaped by populist ideas or their radical left ideology?

Building on the evidence gathered through this question and related sub-question, I pose an exploratory one that asks:

RQ2: Why does the populist radical left engage with the politics of insecurity (if this is widely associated with their - often loathed - radical right competitor)? Is it a matter of ideas or strategy?

These questions are applied to the French case, which offers a particularly instructive case study for populism research (Ivaldi 2019; Shields, 2021), and more specifically to Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party *La France Insoumise* (LFI), now widely established in the literature as an expression of radical left populism (Cautrès 2017; Chiocchetti 2020; Hamburger 2018; Marlière 2019).

Crucially, Mélenchon and LFI meet three criteria that I establish as fundamental for answering the research questions under investigation here. The criteria relate to the consensus around their populism, the coexistence with the PRR and their wide range of communication tools (see Chapter 4 on Case Study and Methods for a discussion). In brief, Mélenchon and LFI are widely established in the literature as an expression of radical left populism (Cautrès 2017; Chiocchetti 2020; Hamburger 2018; Marlière 2019) which allows us to study an unambiguous case (Criterion 1). They provide a rare European example of coexistence with the PRR (the National Rally of Marine Le Pen - *Rassemblement National*, formerly Front National), which allow us to compare their narrative in an equal context and time frame (Criterion 2). Finally, they

use a variety of media platforms, formats and packaging to communicate their message, which puts my communication model to the hard test (Criterion 3).

To answer the first question on how (in)security is constructed and communicated to the public, the project looks at the so-called ‘supply side’ of populist politics and carries out an extensive content analysis of the party’s and its leader’s communication in the period 2017-2020. The analysis looks at what frames are mobilised to discuss (in)security and what *kinds* of insecurity are salient; it also identified what actors/groups are pinpointed as producing insecurity vs being affected by it. This is followed by a qualitative content analysis which delves into the ‘stories’ that Mélenchon and LFI articulate to the public, with the aim to reconstruct the ‘security imaginary’ that dominates their vision of contemporary (in)security.

To answer the second research question, the project turns to expert interviews with academics specialising on Mélenchon and LFI and generally close to the party (N=8). This part of the study disentangles what is (in)security for Mélenchon and LFI, while exploring the role of ideas and strategies in explaining their engagement with the politics of insecurity. In doing so, the project generates informed hypotheses for future research to establish whether the PRL’s insecurity narratives are used strategically or are genuine ideas around the state of contemporary insecurity.

1.7. Contribution

This work provides four contributions to the academic literature. First, it enriches the literature on populism by asking whether insecurity is a key ideational resource that the PRL may use as their radical right competitors. The thesis shows that the relationship of insecurity that Mélenchon and LFI construct is first and foremost

populist, because it identifies the people vs. the elites as the main 'characters' of the 'insecurity story'. The narrative is shaped by their thick radical left ideology but it is nonetheless mainly populist at its core. Based on this evidence, the thesis argues that insecurity may hold an important role in the structure of the populist ideology (regardless of left/right distinctions). Insecurity appears as the principle according to which the elites are pitted against the people: the elites are not the 'enemy' because they are not virtuous, or do not represent the will of the people, but because they fundamentally endanger them. Hence the logic behind populism is not simply 'the people are virtuous and the elites malevolent' or 'the people have one will and the elites do not implement it' but rather: 'the people are in danger and the elites produce that insecurity'. However as this research was based on a case study, its findings are not generalisable - nor was the intention of the present project to develop a general theory on the role of insecurity in populist narratives and ideas. The study, nonetheless, provides a rationale for future research to test the hypothesis that insecurity is an important concept in the populist ideological structure that defines the people vs elite struggle.

Second, by pointing out the role that insecurity may play in the rhetoric of these parties, this research helps us broaden our understanding of the PRL by providing an extensive account of how the populist features and left positioning of Mélenchon and LFI have come together to shape their narratives on the state of insecurity in our societies. In doing so, this research ensures an accumulation of knowledge on the PRL, a case that has been comparatively less studied than its radical right counterpart in Europe. Moreover, comparing the PRL on a theme usually associated with the PRR helps us determine the points of distinctiveness and overlap between varieties of

populism. This in turn allows us to refine our theorisations on whether different forms of populism are fundamentally different or essentially the same.

Third, this research extends the work of political science scholars interested in the relevance of insecurity in redefining the political cleavage in Western Europe (Betz 1994; Kriesi 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018). With its focus on political narratives as guiding principles for citizens' deconstruction of unfolding political developments, this work connects studies on the structural causes of insecurity with individual-level analyses on threat perception. Both these accounts are relevant for advancing our knowledge of populist success, but they overlook the agency of populist parties and leaders in guiding the deconstruction of information and the creation of meaning. The present research highlights how the same structural processes (e.g., globalisation) can be presented to the public with divergent interpretations, focusing more specifically on the contribution of PRL's narratives. By problematizing how other populist actors beyond the 'usual suspects' of the populist radical right talk about security with their public, the project unveils how structural processes are presented to the public while unpacking the agency of populist actors in guiding processes of sense-making.

Finally, this research contributes to the populism literature by bringing it in conversation with other traditions, most notably International Relations studies inspired by constructivism, alongside social and political psychology examinations of ontological insecurity and sense-making. By integrating these conceptual frameworks, the thesis contributes to the cross-fertilisation between different academic fields which is necessary in order to understand populism as a 'real world' phenomenon and in all its complexity. Unpacking populism means disentangling the real-world intricacy of party agency, strategy and communication, alongside citizens' feelings and interpretations of complex phenomena such as modern risks. While single disciplines

lack the comprehensive theoretical frameworks needed to understand those interrelations, this study shows the analytical utility that interdisciplinarity can offer.

1.8. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, including this Introduction which functions as *Chapter 1*.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review that discusses academic findings on three main themes: what is populism, what is security, and what is the relationship between the two. The chapter brings together different works from studies on populism, international relations, political communication and political psychology to determine how we can best define the key terms of relevance to this project, what debates exist around these concepts, and how they relate to one another. The chapter includes in-depth discussions on the definitions adopted in the thesis and the rationale behind such choices, expanding on what has been presented in this Introduction.

Chapter 3 builds on the limitations and research gaps identified in the literature review to present the thesis's theoretical framework, which is employed in later chapters to capture 'the politics of insecurity' in empirical discourse. The framework is broken down into a) four *insecurity frames* (insecurity as threat, insecurity as uncertainty, insecurity as the need for protection and insecurity by association), b) the *relationships of insecurity* that these frames make possible, and c) the overall *security imaginary* that results from the process of insecurity construction.

Chapter 4 introduces the case study of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and LFI, discussing the selection criteria and providing additional context around this analytical choice.

Moving to the methods, the chapter examines in detail how both the content analysis and interview studies were set up, piloted and carried out.

Chapter 5 centres on the empirical findings of the content analysis study and provides a rich analysis of how Mélenchon and LFI have engaged with the politics of insecurity during the selected timeframe (2017-2020). It unpacks the framing process at play, as well as the characters, functions and logics of their insecurity narratives.

Chapter 6 builds on the content analysis study to start understanding *why* Mélenchon and LFI engage with the politics of insecurity. With the help of expert interviews, the chapter explores five key strategic aims that may guide the party's take on contemporary insecurity and proposes them as hypotheses for further research. It also discusses how populist and left-wing ideas come together to produce a unique blend of insecurity narratives.

Chapter 7 brings together the study's main starting points, aims and assumptions and summarises what answers the findings have provided to the research questions. In particular, it discusses the main findings in dialogue with the existing scholarship, pointing out where this research expands or challenges available theories. It delves into the four contributions that this project delivers to the academic literature (as outlined in the previous section 1.7.). Before suggesting avenues for future research, it reflects on the study's three key limitations: the subjectivity of the researcher, the case study setting and the narrow focus on language.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In order to determine the status and limitations of our current knowledge on the relationship between the populist radical left (PRL) and (in)security, I review the literature and engage with extant debates on:

1. What is populism?
2. What is (in)security?
3. How do these concepts intertwine?
4. How can we know more about *the PRL*, more specifically, and (in)security?

To answer the first two questions, I present two extensive discussions, first on the concept of populism and second on the concept of (in)security, which are crucial to locating where this research positions itself in relation to the available scholarship and to clarify how it understands the two concepts for the purpose of this study.

When we move to the studies that have looked at populism specifically in relation to (in)security (question 3), I examine them by considering three important dimensions. First, the ‘macro level’, that is, the literature interested in the structural causes of populist success, which links the role of insecurities to support for populism. Second, the ‘individual level’, which comprises studies documenting how individual feelings and affective states of insecurity make citizens more prone to populist appeals. Third, the ‘communication level’, that is, the scholarship interested in how populist actors narrate issues of threat and danger to their public. The advantage is that, by studying simultaneously these dimensions of the relationship between insecurity and populism,

we are able to disentangle what structural processes and individual feelings constitute a fertile ground for populists to act upon and how.

Finally, I examine how what we already know about the PRL can help us hypothesise its relation to the dynamics of insecurity construction.

2.2. What is populism?

Populism is an essentially contested concept (Rooduijn in Bonikowski et al, 2019: 66) of slippery and chameleonic nature (Taggart 2004), which has puzzled scholars for decades and has now found renewed attention. In the last two decades, populists have found their way to government, either as central actors or junior coalition partners, across most of Western and Eastern Europe (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Stanley 2017); countries such as Italy and Switzerland have been described as populist paradises (Zanatta 2002; Albertazzi 2008) and Greece as a populist democracy (Pappas 2013). The recent election of Bolsonaro in Brazil has brought the spotlight back on Latin America, a region that has boosted populists in power for decades (de la Torre 2017). Finally, populists have provoked heated debates in recent times also in connection with Brexit and the election of Donald Trump (Inglehart and Norris 2016).

There is no accepted consensus among scholars as to what populism is or how it can be defined, although Benjamin Moffitt (2020) has recently suggested that the significant disagreement of the past decades is gradually coming together towards a gravitational centre: the struggle between the people and the elites. Considering that several approaches to the phenomenon still exist, it is important to examine the arguments of each strand of this literature before discussing the definition I adopt for this research.

The **Ideational Approach** follows the influential definition of Cas Mudde (2004: 543) who sees populism as “an 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”. In this view, populism is ‘first and foremost about ideas’ but more specifically, it is an ideology based on a fundamental *moral* opposition between the people and the elites (Mudde 2017). This set of ideas is certainly quite narrow and rudimentary, and for this reason proponents of the ideational approach conceptualise populism as a *thin ideology* that, precisely because of its restricted core, always comes attached to other ‘thick’ or ‘full’ ideologies. That is, populism lacks the three-tiered structure that Michael Freeden (1996) put forward in his influential morphology of ideologies: ‘full’ ideologies are said to contain a core plus adjacent and peripheral concepts, while thin-centred ideologies only display a restricted core attached to a narrow range of concepts.

The ideational approach has a corollary, **Communication Approach** studying how the populist ideology is manifested. In this view, populism is conceptualised as a thin ideology consisting of core ideological dimensions that can be broken down into ‘key messages’ (Ernst, Engesser and Esser 2017). Doing so, allows for the measurement of degrees or types of populism in political actors and the media. Scholars concur that people-centrism and anti-elitism constitute the core ideological dimension of populism (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011); however, they disagree on what other components can be considered as such, including popular sovereignty (Ernst, Engesser and Esser 2017; Wirth et al. 2016) and exclusionism (Cranmer 2011; Jagers and Walgrave 2006). The majority of studies, therefore, use two or three of these dimensions to capture populism; as Wirz (2018) notes, their findings suggest that

populist strategies can be systematised into two broad categories: on the one hand, populists use *advocative messages* to refer to ‘the people’, narrating their monolithic and uniform character, as well as stressing their virtues; on the other hand, they use *conflictive messages* to exclude, discredit and blame elites and out-groups. Overall, the approach builds upon Mudde (2004) and, despite scholarly divergences, is united in its interest to empirically investigate how populist ideas are transmitted to audiences.

Moving forward to the **Discursive Approach**, an important remark is in order. The approach originates from the work of philosopher Ernesto Laclau (2005) who nonetheless conceived populism as a special type of *political logic*. For Laclau, populism is a mode of doing politics that mobilises popular support through the use of an empty signifier: ‘the people’. The latter, in his view, is an imprecise and ambiguous concept that becomes powerful precisely because it remains open for the audiences’ own interpretations. His theory thus captured and emphasised the processes through which social meaning is made and, in this way, laid the foundational ground for the discourse approach, which focuses on how that social meaning is articulated by populist leaders. For the exponents of the so-called ‘Essex School’, populism is a particular antagonistic *discourse*, “an anti-status quo discourse that simplifies the political space by symbolically dividing society between ‘the people’ (as the ‘underdogs’) and its ‘other’” (Panizza, 2005: 3). Discourse is for these authors much more than the rhetoric and communication practices of populists, as we have seen with communication scholars; for them, discourse captures all “systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects” (Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis, 2000: 3-4).

Also Moffitt and Tormey’s (2014) **Political Style approach** moves beyond the communicative and rhetorical elements of populism highlighted by previous

approaches to bring attention to a wider set of *performative repertoires*. For the authors, populism is a political style, that is, a repertoire of performances that populist leaders use to create and affect a political relationship with the people (ibid. 387-88). The central populist performances would be three: an appeal to the people with which populists build their dichotomous vision of society, divided between people and *distinct* elites and Others²; bad manners, which take the form of coarse language, to build closeness to the ordinary people; finally, discourses of crisis and evocations of emergency, which build a sense of urgency that in turn simplifies the terrain of the political debate and justifies immediate action. This approach thus expands the debate by shifting the definitional focus from the content of populist articulations to the performances that produce them.

In a similar way, also the **Strategy Approach** shifts the focus of the debate away from the content of populism, this time to give space to its organisational appearance. For Kurt Weyland (2001: 14) populism is “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalised support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers” (Weyland, 2001: 14). This approach is the only that does not revolve around the opposition between people/elite, which all other approaches acknowledge and share as the distinguishing feature of populism. Moreover, the approach originates in the experiences of Latin American populism, where political parties are weak and leaders dominate the political sphere. It is therefore highly context-dependent and perhaps not applicable to Europe and North America, where on the contrary party organisations still play a central role. Hence, Weyland’s approach has been criticised

² Moffitt and Tormey (2014) disagree with the basic tenant of Mudde’s definition concerning the dichotomy pure people/corrupt elites. For them, populists posit elites as distinct from them and from the people, rather than necessarily corrupt.

as incomplete because, by emphasising the material aspects of the populist modes of organisation, it does not capture what truly distinguishes the populist essence from, for instance, any other type of 'social movement' (Hawkins 2010). Moreover, as Moffitt and Tormey (2014) note, this definition eclipses the crucial role that 'the people' feature plays in marking the distinction with other phenomena.

Most of these definitions agree that populism portrays society as divided into two, morally charged, camps: a good, hard-working, virtuous and homogeneous people and a self-serving, alien elite that does not work in the interest of the sovereign people. However the debate on what lies at the very essence of populism - if a set of ideas, a discourse, a style of politics and so on - continues, thus not providing a definite answer to the question of what populism is. This debate retains significant importance in academia because the implications of this disagreement go beyond the definitional issue and impact how populist actors are identified in empirical research: for instance, while the ideational approach separates populists from non-populists based on ideological features, discourse scholars would argue that actors can utilise populism to different *degrees*.

Since the debate continues, the question we need to answer now is how populism is understood for the purpose of this research.

2.2.1. The Thesis' Approach to Populism

In order to understand the place that (in)security holds in the narratives of the PRL, which is the focus of this research, the most useful of these approaches to populism is the ideational framework. This approach has the special analytical advantage to allow for populism to be investigated empirically by focusing on both the supply and

demand sides, in order to understand its emergence, development or failure (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013b). Furthermore, the approach has become increasingly influential in comparative populism research, because of its capacity to *distinguish* the phenomenon from others, to *categorise* it into logical taxonomies, to *travel* across different areas and finally because of its *versatile* application to different levels of analysis (the four strengths of the approach as identified by Mudde 2017).

Within the ideational framework, my project adopts more specifically a communication approach, in that it looks at how the populist ideology is manifested through communication practices. In particular, I concur with Reinemann et al. (2016) that populism might be understood as a set of features or elements of communicative messages that have their roots in, and resonate with, people's motives and attitudes; as Kriesi (2014) argues, communication strategies are expressions of the populist ideology that allow to identify it empirically.

This approach serves the purpose of this research in that it allows us to investigate the often missing link between structural explanations for populism and individual perceptual accounts; as Reinemann et al. (2016) argue, macro-level processes are not perceived directly by citizens and how they should be interpreted and understood is not self-evident; it is messages by political actors and also the media that filter and affect those interpretations. This project, in particular, is interested in how the PRL narrates and understands the contemporary meaning of (in)security to their audiences; this entails exploring what meaning these actors attribute to security and insecurity, how they interpret their broad causes, effects and solutions, and how does their vision links to their populism. In other words, looking at populism through the communication approach lenses allow us to bridge the structural and individual dimensions of the populism-insecurity nexus by unpacking the way it is communicated.

As we have seen above, there are other approaches to populism; this phenomenon is also viewed as a political logic (Laclau 2005) and an anti-status quo discourse (Panizza 2005), a political strategy entailing a particular mode of organisation (Weyland 2001) or a distinct political style (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). But as March (2007: 65) remarks, “charismatic authority, anti-institutional mobilisation, simplistic language and a reliance on slogans are features shared by many non-populist actors. The ideological focus on the ‘corrupt elite’ versus ‘moral people’ dichotomy is not”. At the core of this thesis’ argument, to which I will return in later sections, is that this ideological focus has an insecurity dimension that is highlighted in the way populist ideas are communicated to the public: populists often adopt a language of insecurity to narrate a victimised people, deprived or jeopardised in their sovereignty, controlled by nefarious elites and challenged in their economic and/or cultural safety by dangerous Others. By analysing the case of populism on the radical left, the ultimate aim of this research is to understand whether there is an inherent connection between populism and (in)security that transcends ideological left-right distinctions.

2.2.2. Constitutive Elements

Conceptualising populism within the framework of the ideational approach means also examining what elements are constitutive of this ideology. The majority of researchers in the field (and not only within this approach) agree that three core concepts indicate the presence of populism: the people, the elites and the general will.

First of all, populism makes a wide appeal to an idealised and hyper-vague audience, **‘the people’**, that is an inclusive and exclusive, integrative and divisive

conceptualisation, that eventually means different things to different populists (Canovan 1984). The meaning of this concept has therefore been at the centre of academic debates and while some authors have focused on the ‘content’ that can be attributed to the term, others have highlighted its affective power. This latter perspective is highlighted in the work of Taggart (2004: 274) who sees the people as the inhabitants of a *heartland*, an idealised community that “is felt rather than reasoned” and is characterized by “moderation, dutifulness, ordinariness”. The sense of ‘belonging’ is central in this conceptualisation and, according to the author, is what makes the concept powerful despite its imprecision and ambiguity. On the other hand, the scholars who focus on the ‘content’ of the term have highlighted the different connotations that the notion may have (Canovan 1984; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013a). First, the people may be intended with a ‘democratic’ connotation to indicate the ultimate source of power in a democratic regime; hence, the people as the sovereign, the ruler. Second, the term can be used to refer to an average socioeconomic status, which usually brings together the majority of citizens in a given country; thus the people as ‘the common’ and ‘ordinary’ people. Finally, the ethno-nationalist connotation gives the term a more nativist dimension and appeals to those that are said to share cultural roots and belong to the same national community. Populists use some of these appeals rather than others in combination with their ‘host’ ideology. Some authors have also noted that populists treat ‘the people’ as a ‘sacred entity’, ascribing to it quasi-religious qualities such as purity and moral superiority, even in contexts where religion has not a significant appeal (Kettell and Kerr 2022).

The second constitutive element can be traced in **the elites**. Populism is particularly hostile to the so-called elites, that is, the established political, economic, media and intellectual powers within a given society. As for ‘the people’, different

conceptualisations of the elite exist and distinguish the more socio-economic focus of left populists from the more culturally centred right-wing counterpart (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013b). However, as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (ibid.) point out, the distinction is first and foremost moral. Following the populist narrative, the elites embody corruption, self-interest and arrogance, and usurp the power of the true sovereign, the people, which is inherently good but unarmed against these shady forces. Confronting and exposing this corrupted establishment are pivotal structural pillars of populist political thought (Mény and Surel 2002). Nonetheless, despite this enemification of the elite, populism is not inherently averse to the principles of representative politics *per se*, as Taggart (2000) claims. Populism prompts the idea that the people should still be represented, but by leaders who are perceived to be 'like them' (Albertazzi and Mueller 2013, 348).

The third core tenant of the populist 'vision' of society is that the people, being one, have a monolithic **general will**. This means that, rather than a set of pluralistic demands and desires, the people would share a single common interest, which is not implemented by those in power (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013b). For Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013a: 151), this aspect is often side-lined in the current scholarship, which tends to focus on the constructed struggle between the people and the elite; the general will, however, constitutes as much as a core concept because populism "is also about the very idea that all individuals of a given community are able to unify their wills with the aim of proclaiming popular sovereignty as the only legitimate source of political power". The issue of the general will is thus highly entrenched with the question of representative and liberal democracy. Several authors have pointed out that populism sits uneasily with representative democracy because it denies that the power of the people is mediated (Meny and Surel 2002; Taggart 2004). As a

consequence, populists advocate for the increment of direct democracy measures, such as the referendum, to obviate this downside of the contemporary system. In addition, because of their reluctance to accept that power is also limited, they conflict with liberal components of contemporary democracy (Albertazzi and Mueller 2013; Pappas 2019).

2.2.3. Varieties of populism

Understanding the different forms that populism assumes is important for unpacking the relationship between populism and (in)security, because some varieties of populisms (i.e., the radical right) have particular ideological properties that make them prone to a special link with security and insecurity.

Among the constitutive elements of populism explored in the earlier section, the conceptualisation and meaning attributed to the people is often used as the basis for categorising two varieties of populism. For Kriesi (2014), for example, it allow us to distinguish populism on the left from that on the right, in that *left-wing populism* pits the people ‘as a class’ against the unaccountable economic and technocratic elites of the globalised world, whereas *populists of the right* appeal to the people ‘as a nation’ and antagonise not only the elite in power but also what Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008, 3) call the ‘dangerous others’.

Within this broad appeal to the nation, it is important to distinguish the feature of nativism, as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013b) remark. Nativism is ‘one way’ of conceiving the nation and is specific to a subfamily of right populists, the *populist radical right* (PRR); it revolves around the idea of the prioritisation of natives and the exclusion of foreigners, because of the inherent existential threat they are said to pose

to the national community (Mudde 2007). The PRR merges this ideological component with populism, as defined by Mudde (2004), and authoritarianism, which refers to the strict adherence to order in society and the belief that infringements of authority are to be punished severely. It is these three ideological features that describe the subfamily of right populists that is usually most common in Europe (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013b), i.e., the PRR.

The PRR can also be pinned down with reference to three dimensions of symbolic, material and political exclusion that, according to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013a) distinguish it from its inclusionary populist counterpart. For the authors, inclusionary populists (a prototype of populists in Latin America) target specific subgroups to include them as beneficiaries of state resources, to increase their political participation and to symbolically mark their 'belonging' to the ordinary people; on the contrary, the populist radical right is an example of exclusionary populism, in that it targets groups that are said not to belong to the national community with measures or discourses that exclude them from the redistribution of resources, political participation and overall from 'the people'.

Because of its emphasis on law, order, authority and exclusion, the PRR is the focus of almost all studies that have attempted to disentangle the relationship between populism and (in)security. Why has the literature not examined the way the PRR understands and narrates the meaning of contemporary (in)security? To put it differently, is the left-right ideological cleavage inconsequential for understanding (in)security narratives in populist communication? Can we learn something more about populism if we do not assume that (in)security is not an ideational resource the left can use? In order to answer these questions, we need to take a closer look at the PRR and its main characteristics.

2.2.4. Populism on the left

Based on Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2013a) typology, generally speaking left-wing populism is an inclusionary variant of populism that promotes a broader (and therefore inclusive) understanding of the people, based on symbolic, material and political dimensions. This means populists on the left do not build nativist barriers to access material resources, participate in politics or to define who belongs in the ingroup (Font et al. 2019).

In Europe, left-wing populism is especially present in its *radical* form. The radicalism of these parties entails an underlying rejection of capitalism, not only as an economic structure but also in the values it promotes and the practices it fosters (March and Mudde 2005). However, their radicalism has evolved and changed over time and it is only after the early 2000s that it increasingly intertwines with populism: while the European radical left of the XX century was mainly associated with communist parties and the appeal to the working class, the 'new' *populist* radical left focuses on anti-austerity and pits a moral struggle between an inclusively-defined people and an evil oligarchy (Charalambous and Ioannou 2020). For Marco Damiani (2020, 51), the principle of social inclusion is at the heart of the PRL's social imaginary, that is, the ideational space that structures their values. By abandoning the principle of equality for the broader value of social inclusion, the PRL has been able to appeal to a larger political community than the working class. Indeed, compared to traditional radical left parties, the PRL articulates its positions with regard to 'the people' rather than the proletariat, thus bringing together a multitude of political subjects from various social backgrounds.

To what extent left radicalism intertwines with populism is still an open debate. On the one hand, authors such as March (2011) warn that the two terms should not be used as synonyms and that, among the four subgroups constituting the radical left (*populist socialists, social populists, democratic socialists and communists*), only the first two intertwine with populism. For March (2009, 127), *populist socialism* retains a socialist core but places broader emphasis on appealing to ‘the people’ (vs. the proletariat) and on particularism (vs. internationalism). *Social populism* is mostly dominated by an incoherent ideology that fuses left and right-wing themes with a strong anti-establishment appeal. (ibid.).

On the other hand, scholars such as Roodjuin and Akkerman (2015) have found populism to increase towards the far ends of the political spectrum, leading them to argue that, regardless of the left-right positioning, European politics is characterised by radical parties that are generally populists. However this argument is certainly an approximation, as the quantitative methods at the centre of the study cannot entirely capture the rich variety at the heart of the European radical left. Therefore it is more accurate to claim that, although some radical left parties have embraced populism, the two do not go necessarily together.

A second important debate that characterises the field is whether the PRL is a threat or a corrective to democracy, compared to the PRR. Political theorist Chantal Mouffe, one of the leading voices on left populism as a progressive force, argues that the PRL is the response needed to tackle the threat posed by radical right populism on the one hand and neoliberalism on the other (Mouffe 2018). Contrary to the PRR party family, the PRL is said to be a positive and progressive force that brings the struggle among adversaries (rather than enemies) at the heart of politics. In doing so, the PRL challenges the *antagonism* brought by the PRR and replace it with *agonism*,

while also challenging the ‘post-political’ way of doing politics at the heart of neoliberalism (ibid.). Mouffe uses the notions of agonism and antagonism to explain the differences between the PRL and the PRR. She argues that the PRL considers its opponents as legitimate political competitors rather than enemies to eliminate; hence, these parties apply an agonistic logic to political competition (i.e., they consider it as a struggle between adversaries) whereas the PRR applies an antagonistic logic (a struggle between enemies).

These arguments lead to the broader debate on the role of *pluralism* in European democracies. While scholars have suggested that by being anti-pluralist, populists pose a threat to liberal democracy (Müller 2016), Mouffe (2018) contends that only the PRR can fall into this category. This is because, as highlighted above, they apply an antagonist principle to political affairs, unlike the PRL, which favours a more pluralist agonism. However, recent works have pointed out that Mouffe’s arguments are not substantiated by empirical evidence and that, when looking at how some left populists such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon communicate, the antagonistic and ‘enemifying’ language is striking (Bonansinga 2022). As argued in the Introduction (see: Chapter 1), the present thesis is using the construction of insecurity as an analytical tool to better understand the role of this ideational resource in different populism varieties. This will also allow us to further theorise aspects of the PRL vis-à-vis the PRR.

Section 2.5 will return to the link between insecurity and the PRL in particular, to expand on this research gap. However before doing that, I will first clarify what is meant by ‘(in)security’ (Section 2.3), to then turn to how the literature has dealt with the role of security in relation to the PRR (Section 2.4). After reviewing these additional aspects of the literature, I will start delineating the theoretical framework to answer my research questions.

2.3. What is (in)security?

The key question of this section is somehow a double question because when talking about insecurity we need its counterpart as a starting point - security. This is because, in the social sciences, scholars often refer to security and insecurity simultaneously. Many, including myself, use the appellation '(in)security' precisely to denote the profound connection between the two terms, as to imply that when talking about one, we are necessarily also talking about the other. This is reflected in the literature and the use that scholars make of the two concepts. In International Relations, for example, security and insecurity are considered the antithesis of each other: security "has the distinction of containing the kernel of its own non-being" (Burgess 2019: 102). Importantly, this antithesis is *constitutive*, because "security can only be security by virtue of its insecurity. Its insecurity is its essence, its core" (ibid.). As Anthony Burke (2002, 20) noted, security can never escape insecurity - "it must continue to produce images of 'insecurity' in order to retain meaning". To say it with Jef Huysmans (2014), there is "no way of doing security without foregrounding insecurities". Anthropologists who study security would call this a dialectical relationship, as the discourse of security is essentially tied to its opposite, insecurity (Goldstein 2015). Hence, to answer what insecurity is, I start by examining how extant literatures understand and delineate the concept of *security*.

Security is a key concept in Politics and International Relations that, although essential to debates in the field, is very differently defined. Mainstream approaches have traditionally conceptualised security as 'national security' and thus in relation to states as the main level of analysis. When states are considered the sole referent objects for the concept, the definition of what constitutes a threat is equally restrained.

As Alan Collins (2016, 3) shows in his tabular overview of the main definitions in the discipline, references to states, war and the use of force feature prominently. From mainstream IR perspectives, security is therefore the safety of the state from a range of threats to its survival, most notably from crime (domestic security) and conflict (international security).

Dissenting voices from what has come to be later known as Critical Security Studies have challenged traditional approaches along two key dimensions - the level of analysis and the types of threat to be considered - advocating respectively to *deepen* the study of security beyond states and to *broaden* it beyond military threats (Bourbeau, Balzacq and Cavelty 2015). Despite initial resistance and accusations of diluting the concept of security as to emptying it of any analytical value, the idea to move beyond state and military security is now established as a valid alternative to traditional approaches. Surveys across Western democracies (e.g., Ipsos What Worries The World series) show an increased salience of *diverse* security concerns among citizens, from issues of identity to the economy or the environment. This is testament to the relevance of security as going well beyond domestic crime and international conflict (as studied in traditional Politics and IR paradigms) and to the necessity to expand the conceptual toolkit we use to understand these concerns. To this extent, borrowing from psychoanalysis (Laing 1960), political psychology scholars have pointed out the relevance of the concepts of ontological security and insecurity as a novel lens for understanding European politics. Ontological security is the perception of safety of the Self (Giddens 1991). As a concept, it has been applied both to individuals and communities (such as nation-states), because it taps into the relevance of identity, of feeling 'whole' in order to feel secure (Kinnvall 2018; Subotic 2016). For Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen (2018), EU studies rely heavily on

institutional and policy analyses, but these are ill-equipped to capture the relevance of individual anxieties and insecurities for political change. This is because the salience of security in European politics has traditionally been associated with physical security and territorial integrity; however, we need to acknowledge that the understanding of the concept has gradually evolved to encompass modern risks, anxieties and insecurities (Hegemann and Schneckener 2019). Political psychologists thus suggest that the challenges the EU is facing, from social and economic to political crises, are deeply intertwined if considered through an ontological security lens.

These different challenges to mainstream conceptions of (domestic and military) security show the relevance of multidisciplinary in tackling the puzzle of what security is. Hence, in order to capture the variety of existing meanings that can be attributed to security, Philippe Bourbeau's (2015) collective volume brought together a series of disciplines, such as political philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology, engaging in a dialogue on its definition. As Daniel Goldstein (2015; in the same volume) remarks, security is almost inescapably interdisciplinary; we can only better interpret the complexities around the reality we observe and wish to study by looking beyond the confines of a single discipline.

After analysing these different literatures, I propose discerning five main conceptualisations of security that also shed light on what we intend when we talk about insecurities: security as managing threats and risk, security as a psychological state, security as certainty, security as protection and security by association.

Security as managing threats and risks. Arnold Wolfers' (1952) definition of security as the 'absence of threats' has provided a fundamental conceptual basis for substantial scholarship in IR. This way of conceptualising security follows a dual logic:

security equates to the absence of danger and consequentially, insecurity to the presence of danger. However, an absence of threats at all times is impossible if not unthinkable: security therefore can best be understood as managing and dealing with those threats (Nye and Lynn-Jones 1988). Alongside threats, this conceptualisation also includes the notion of 'risk', which shifts the focus of security from known and identifiable causes to potential harm (Bourbeau, Balzacq and Cavelty 2015). The idea of security as also including a management of risks can be reconnected to Beck's (1992) seminal book in which he argued that the nature and impact of potential harms in contemporary societies have evolved significantly beyond crime and we are witnessing a shift to managing harms before they realise - that is, managing risks.

Security as a psychological state. A second way of seeing security places emphasis on a psychological state of security, which includes a *sense* of certainty, stability, safety. Security and insecurity are intended as psychological states that the individual strives to respectively maintain and overcome (O'Brien and Tropp 2015). This 'psychological' understanding of security provides two central contributions to the study of the phenomenon: first, it shifts the exclusive focus on the state as the main level of analysis to stress the primacy of individual and collective experiences; second, it moves away from the assumption of traditional IR paradigms that the security of the state and its priorities equate with the security of its citizens. The understanding of security as embedded in feelings thus points out that, rather than objective and well-defined, security is experienced by individuals in relation to their perception of stable selfhood in a stable environment (Bar-Tal 2020).

Security as certainty. Security can also be considered as the *condition* that stems from and further assures certainty, stability, safety, predictability. This is a typical understanding of sociology studies, where security, and especially insecurity, are seen as either structural conditions influenced by factors such as class, gender or race, or as socially constructed realities (Stampnitzky and Mattson 2015). While security as a psychological state focuses on subjective feelings and experiences, security as seen by sociologists emphasises the role that material and structural conditions play in determining who is 'secure' and who is not.

Security as protection. One conceptualisation envisions security indirectly through the idea of protection and preservation: a referent object is secure when protected and insecure when in need of protection. Political philosophers trace back the association of security with protection to the way Thomas Hobbes translated Thucydides (Herington 2015). The latter used the Greek word *asphaleia* to indicate the 'physical standing' of the Athenian empire, as opposed to its *sphallo*, that is overthrowing, and thus fall, ruin. Hobbes translated the use of such word variously as "assurance", "protection", "safety" and "security", thus providing the concept of security with an intellectual trajectory that linked it to the idea of defence (Herington 2015). Psychologists also reiterate the connection between security and protection, as the two notions reflect the same basic human need to ensure safety and survival (Bar-Tal and Jacobson 1998).

Security by association. One last conceptualisation sees security as the result of a transfer process that links new themes with existing security themes (Huysmans 2006). This means that, in addition to having some specific properties, security can

also ‘spill over’ from one issue to the other when the association is made in the discourse and practice of governments and political leaders. For some, for instance, immigration has become a security issue precisely because of its articulation in relation to other security issues such as crime and terrorism, hence establishing a link that allows security to spill over (Huysmans 2006).

Examining other literatures makes evident how security can have a plethora of meanings that extend beyond national security, as privileged in mainstream IR scholarship. This suggests a need to study the overall process of constructing and communicating security (see next section) without restricting ourselves to a particular meaning of the term. As David Campbell argues (1998 in Lott 2018, chapter 3), “security cannot be provided a fixed definition because it is a process rather than an end”. By refraining from adopting a specific definition over another, we are able to observe what *kind* of security meaning is mobilised by political actors (the PRL in this case) with their public. Furthermore, we are able to disentangle security from its traditional law and order meaning, and to observe its discursive manifestation beyond the actors that would usually privilege that conceptualisation. Finally, we can gain a fine-grained understanding of the micro-dynamics embedded in appeals to security and discourses of insecurity. In the next section, we discuss how it is possible to unpack these by studying the construction of (in)security.

2.3.1. The construction of (in)security

Working without an established definition of security entails observing how its diverse meanings are communicated. For IR constructivists, as well as sociologists and

anthropologists, security is best understood as a *process* that shapes our perception and understanding of what issues are *security issues*.

In a ground-breaking contribution to the understanding of security, Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde (1998) proposed the concept of 'securitisation' to denote a process that inter-subjectively *constructs* the meaning of security. Securitising means discursively constructing an issue as an existential threat that undermines the very existence of a given community, while pointing out that extraordinary measures are required to restore safety.

Security as a social construct thus acquires meaning only in relation to a specific context and as a result of specific discourses. Contrary to mainstream IR theories (i.e., realism, neorealism) that consider security and insecurity to be objective features that can be empirically detected through material factors, a constructivist approach highlights the role of language, culture and ideas in security representation. Rather than focusing on objective threats, seeing security as 'socially constructed' places emphasis on what we *come to see* as threats and dangers. An essential quality of the securitisation process is thus the 'staging' of a presumed security issue; in order to grasp securitisation, one should not analyse objective threats but rather focus on "the processes of constructing a shared understanding of what is to be considered and collectively responded to as a threat" (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998: 26). It is for this reason that scholars interested in how we come to see issues as 'security issues' have predominantly focused on language.

It is important to note that constructing (or as we will see in the next section, *framing*) threats does not automatically imply manipulation. As Bethany Albertson and Shana Kushner Gadarian (2015, 23) put it, "once we are out of the realm of imminent death and destruction, we have more complex phenomena, where some see risks and

costs and others see gains and benefits". Unpacking and analysing how different actors, in this case the PRL, engage in this definition contest helps us understand the role of ideas and strategy in the populist politicisation of (in)security.

The relationship between security and politicisation is a contested one. On the one hand, securitisation theorists argue that the product of successful securitisations, (that is, a securitisation move that is accepted and supported by the recipient audience) is to move an issue outside of the realm of 'normal politics' to enter that of emergency measures. Although this seems to imply that processes of securitisation are political in that they entail contestation over the meaning of security, securitisation scholars also argue that such processes close down the political debate due to the emergent nature of the portrayed crisis. In response to these ambiguities, Huymans (2014) argues that securitisation in contemporary politics and societies does not uniquely or necessarily follow the exceptionalist logic initially suggested by its early theorists; it actually coexists with a more pervasive atmosphere of insecurity and menace that takes the form of a *diffuse securitisation*. Diffuse securitisation is conceptualised as a fragmented and dispersed mode of operation that 'unbinds and scatters' security by projecting language and images of insecurity everywhere.

This closes the circle by taking us back to the idea of contemporary societies as risk societies pervaded by risks that need interpretation; we now turn to how modern threats are communicated and made intelligible.

2.3.2. The communication of (in)security

How does the construction of insecurity take place empirically? Securitisation scholars have referred to the idea of 'speech acts' as utterances that perform the transformation

of social issues into security issues (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998). Some scholars have highlighted that securitisation can also be seen in a *narrative* perspective and intended as a *plot* presenting a danger, a situation reaching a breaking point and a way out (Wilkinson 2015). This is because narratives “are the primary way by which human experience is made meaningful” (Polkinghorne 1988 in Wibben 2014, 120). Security narratives, more specifically, are stories that locate a) threats, b) referents to be secured, c) agents providing security and d) means to restore safety (Wibben 2014). For Wibben (ibid.), crafting particular narratives about security is a process of *framing*. Framing is a process of highlighting particular aspects of a phenomenon in order to cue specific interpretations of it (Entman 1993). This is valid in terms of security narratives as well, because “the way a story is told limits what can be seen, who gets to speak, and whose concerns matter” (Wibben 2014, 121).

In line with the framing approach, but substituting the term ‘securitisation’ or ‘security narratives’ with the *politics of insecurity*, Daniel Béland (2020, 163) similarly talks about how “perceived collective threats are framed and acted upon”. As the framing process consists in ‘identifying a problem and its cause’, ‘giving a normative judgement’ and ‘suggesting solutions’ (as argued by Entman 2004), both securitisation and the politics of insecurity can be seen as parallel processes of threat framing. These approaches suggest that, regardless of the terminology used, the end product of a securitisation move, securitisation narrative, or the politics of insecurity is a ‘story’ of who is in danger and who is framed as the danger.

Despite the role that discursive constructions and a language of security seem to play in these processes, linguistic and communicative analyses are rather scarce. Monica Gariup (2016) has suggested a model to capture processes of securitisation based on a ‘discursive syntax’ that includes 1) subject, 2) referent object, 3) predicate

and 4) prepositional phrases. Under this framework, the model intends to identify the actor that securitises (the subject), who/what is threatened or should be secured (the referent object), the type of action that implements security (predicate) and the details that define the circumstantial elements of security (prepositional phrases). However, Gariup's syntax does not necessarily reflect the weight that certain elements carry in a securitisation narrative as opposed to others. Specifically, the 'threat' is considered a detail among many other 'prepositional' elements; hence, what should be the core of the narrative (ie. the attempt to construct and portray danger) is relegated to a secondary position, as one among other details of the narrative.

Overall what all these approaches have in common is the idea that there is a relationship at play between a subject and an object: one endangers and the other is in danger. Retaining this key insight from these existing approaches, allowed me to build a new conceptual framework around the notion of a *relationship of insecurity* (Bonansinga 2022; for a detailed discussion see next chapter, Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework). In a nutshell, I argue that a relationship of insecurity is the rhetorical construction of the subject-object relation as one that positions them as the danger vs. the endangered. In other words, I argue that at the core of the politics of insecurity is a relational dynamic: the construction of X as producing insecurity at the expense of Y. Although other elements such as a strategy to deal with insecurity add important details to the story, they do not constitute its essence; the latter is better captured by the idea of a relationship of insecurity. In my theoretical framework, I also suggest looking beyond 'threat framing' and conceptualising the politics of insecurity as a *set of frames* that establish a relationship of insecurity between two key objects. This 'set' of frames borrows from the security and insecurity meanings that we have explored in the previous section and is detailed in the next chapter.

In conclusion, the constructivist approach is valuable for applying the study of security to political science and populism studies more specifically. This is because the approach is stripped of any normative stand on what should or should not be considered a security issue; it rather studies the discursive mechanisms and conditions under which certain phenomena assume security status.

Having concluded on how this research conceptualises and understands security, and insecurity, and how these are discursively constructed, the next section (2.4) discusses how (in)security relates to the success of populism. The last section (2.5) will delve more specifically into the relationship between (in)security and the PRL.

2.4. Populism and (in)security

How does populism relate to (in)security? The literature shows that the main ‘actors’ in the populist storytelling are constructed with discursive practises that relate to (in)security: the ‘people’ are in fact often victimised (Wodak 2015), the elites are blamed (Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou and Exadaktylos 2014) and the so-called ‘dangerous others’ (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015) are enemified (Kinnvall 2014). ‘Victims’, ‘perpetrators’, and ‘enemies’ are common to the language of (in)security, in that they describe a circumstance of threat, danger, intentional wrongdoing and harm to a referent object. This shows an inherent interconnection between the two concepts that warrant further investigation.

In the following sections, I examine the literature on the populism-(in)security nexus from three broad angles - the macro level, alongside the individual and communicative levels - as this allows us to disentangle, respectively:

- a) what processes generate contemporary insecurity (the macro level)

b) what individual affective states make citizens prone to populist appeals (the individual level)

c) how populists further reproduced insecurity-centred discourse through their narratives (the communicative level).

What emerges from this analysis is that extant literature has overwhelmingly tackled the relationship between populism and (in)security having the populist radical right in mind, leaving the PRL behind.

2.4.1. The macro level

Why is populism so successful in advanced societies? This question is central in political science scholarship aiming at identifying and explaining the root causes of the increased support for populist parties. Interestingly, the main theses addressing this question pinpoint the crucial role of insecurity.

On the one hand, the losers of globalisation thesis (Grande and Kriesi 2012) focuses on what Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath (2016: 331) call 'left-behinds', that is those social groups "that are united by a general sense of insecurity, pessimism and marginalisation, who do not feel as though elites (...) share their values, represent their interests and genuinely empathise with their intense angst about rapid social, economic and cultural change". Edgar Grande and Hanspeter Kriesi argue that globalisation has created new forms of economic, cultural and political conflict by, respectively, increasing economic competition, cultural diversity and political integration. Society is thus divided by a new cleavage between those who 'win' or 'lose' out from globalisation. The losers of globalisation, in particular, experience insecurity in the form of economic uncertainty, feelings of cultural threat from outsiders and a

sense of loss over weakened sovereignty, and would support populist parties that claim to address such grievances.

On the other hand, the cultural backlash theory (Inglehart and Norris 2016) argues that the new cleavage dividing society is crystallising between those who embrace post-materialist values and those who fear the rapid erosion of previously predominant views. Rather than an alternative explanation, this thesis places emphasis on the rise of new cultural issues and progressive values over the past few decades and points at the role of insecurity as the need to restore and protect traditions.

Alongside cultural and economic anxieties, Yonatan Levi and Shai Agmon (2021) argue that populism may also build on anxieties originating from national security. The authors argue that all populisms attempt to securitise certain anxieties but these can also be related to national security, and not only to the cultural and economic domains. The authors substantiate their argument using Israel as a case in point of a context with heightened security concerns. However this is likely to be a context-dependent argument due to the peculiarities of Israeli politics and the country's history. It is more logical to argue that, besides context-specific features, *different* anxieties can feed populist securitisations, including but not limited to national security.

Confirming that the structural explanation of the populism-(in)security link lies at the intersection of economic, cultural and political factors, rather than in any of them singularly, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018) explain that populist success is deeply rooted in *distrust*, *deprivation*, as well as processes of *destruction* and *dealignment* (that the authors label "the four Ds"). Insecurity is central here, as distrust towards the establishment is underpinned by resentment and fears about lack of voice, deprivation by economic uncertainty and sense of loss, and finally destruction by the

perceived threat that immigration and ethnic change are said to pose to the survival of native communities.

Although acknowledging insecurity with different degrees of explicitness, extant scholarship clearly converges on identifying a wide range of vulnerabilities as drivers of populist support. By detailing how these vulnerabilities have emerged and have gradually grown to provide a fertile ground for populist success, these studies provide the theoretical backbone of the present project and set the stage for interrogating how the PRL translates these contemporary anxieties into political narratives of insecurity, which we know very little about. But before moving to the communicative dimension, I will first examine these insecurities from an individual-level perspective, moving to social and political psychology research that for decades has illustrated these complex psychological dynamics and that more recently has applied them to the study of populist success.

2.4.2. The individual level

Another strand of literature links populist success to insecurity, that of ontological security. Complementing the scholarship disentangling what macro-conditions are provoking a stoking sense of insecurity in post-industrial societies, the literature on ontological security sheds light on how contemporary insecurities are *perceived* at the individual, subjective level, and why this is relevant for the study of populism.

As mentioned in Section 2.3 (What is (in)security?), the concept of ontological security is labelled as such because it concerns individuals' own 'being' and refers to their need to have a stable, safe and secure 'sense of self' (Giddens 1991). This literature provides a valuable contribution to the study of populist success in Europe

because it brings analytical attention to the ‘less visible insecurities’ that citizens across the continent experience on a daily basis (Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen 2018). These insecurities are varied and diverse; they can concern the economy, the state of the welfare system or the capacity of the EU to tackle the many crises it is facing, from debt to a geopolitically unstable neighbourhood (ibid). Therefore the ontological security literature aligns with the constructivist claim that security is not just national security but affects a variety of domains and actors beyond the state (Buzan et al. 1998). This literature also carries a crucial explanatory power that complements institutional, legal and policy analyses (typical of European Studies) which often fail to grasp the significant role that individual anxieties and insecurities play in fuelling political change in contemporary politics. Ontological security also brings to the forefront the role of emotions in relation to populism. Studies have suggested that, besides anxiety and fear (which are the emotions relating to threat and danger), perceptions of ontological insecurity can also prompt *anger* towards those who are deemed responsible (Salmela and von Scheve 2017, 2018) or be fed by feelings of *humiliation* (Homolar and Löffmann 2021). Perceptions of insecurity, however, can also be accompanied by *pride*, when the virtues of the threatened ingroup are emphasised, and by *hope*, when actions to restore safety are proposed (Bonansinga 2021).

Overall, this literature is relevant to the present project because it bridges structural insecurity and individual subjective experiences through a focus on narratives. As we have seen in the earlier section, narratives are tools that “establish cognitive and normative maps to make sense of the world” (Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen 2018, 257). They help the individual ‘project and protect’ their conceptions of stable selfhood across time (Kinnvall 2014; Steele and Homolar 2019). Importantly,

narratives are not only useful to unpack the demand side of populism but also to examine the supply side of populist politics. As Vincent Della Sala (2018) argues, identifying what narratives political actors put forward provides us with important insight into how they have understood the world around them.

Hence narratives are useful to understand how structural processes can be made intelligible to the individual via 'stories', which order and rearrange events, and 'characters' to help make sense of a bigger picture. In other words, they constitute an important part to understand the overlap between demand and supply in populist politics. In the next section, I focus on the latter to shed light on how populists engage in narratives of (in)security.

2.4.3. The communication level

How do populists communicate (in)security? The communicative dimension has been highlighted in several studies, although in different terms and with different labels. These studies have a narrow and almost exclusive focus on the PRR, highlighting the necessity to understand the underlying dynamics that link populism and (in)security more broadly and across the political spectrum. Their findings and conclusions can therefore be taken as the analytical point of departure to test to what extent, how and where the PRL converges or diverges from such discursive practices.

Overall four main approaches emerge from the literature that links populist communication to (in)security and these dynamics have been seen as a manifestation of:

1. A securitisation process
2. The construction of a politics of insecurity

3. A politics of fear
4. A performance of crisis or 'crisis-speak'

The essential idea conveyed by these studies is that there is a centrality of (in)security in populism, manifested through discourses that emphasise threats, dangers and a sense of crisis.

Authors such as Catarina Kinnvall (2014, 2019), Donatella Bonansinga (2019) or Bohdana Kurylo (2020) have shown that a 'securitisation' repertoire characterises the way the European PRR approaches issues of identity, migration, religion, culture and gender. Based on a now established playbook, the PRR usually delineates enemies both inside and outside the nation; then it constructs them as threats to 'the people'; and finally, it mobilises affective narratives - infused with anger, fear but also nostalgia and pride - to articulate those dangers and provide security in the present. Béland (2020) has argued, in similar terms, that populists create collective states of fear and anxiety by performing a 'politics of insecurity' that relies on the constant framing and acting upon perceived collective threats. This focus on the importance of negative emotionality in the link between populism and insecurity, is shared by Ruth Wodak (2015) who talks about the populist tendency to instrumentalise certain actors (usually minorities) as scapegoats and to construct them as dangerous and as a threat to an 'us'. The author labels this 'negative mobilisation' as a 'politics of fear' arguing that it serves as the communicative platform for backwards-oriented politics. Finally, Moffitt's (2015) and Homolar and Scholz's (2019) works on populism and crisis expand the link between populism and insecurity by highlighting how citizens' subjective perceptions of threat can be influenced by the populist tendency to constantly identify, build and perpetuate a sense of crisis, urgency and impending doom.

Taken individually, these works spotlight crucial elements of populist communication on issues of security, showing their interrelatedness. Thorsten Wojczewski (2020, 5-6), for instance, brings them all together by arguing that, when representing the people as under threat, populists engage in ‘a securitisation process’ that propagates a ‘politics of fear and urgency’ and helps perform a ‘politics of insecurity’. Hence all these approaches share the idea that insecurity results from a relational process that frames some issues, actors, and phenomena as a source of danger, crisis, and instability.

Regardless of how these scholars have labelled the process, at the heart of this dynamics is a populist actor engaging in framing, that is, highlighting specific features that promote particular interpretations. To understand if insecurity is a key concept in the populist ideological structure, as is the aim of this project, we need to first unpack if, at the very core of populist narratives there is a *relationship of insecurity*. As mentioned earlier, with this term I refer to the rhetorical construction of a subject-object relation as one that positions them as the danger vs. the endangered (see also Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework for a detailed discussion). The ‘danger’ is the issue or actor that is addressed as representing a threat or danger; as securitisation analysts 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, HIV or climate change - Schafer, Scheffran and Penniket 2016; Sjostedt 2008) and ‘people’ (migrants or Roma minorities are prominent examples in this regard - Huysmans 2000). The ‘endangered’ category captures who is narrated as victim and, while we might be tempted to assume that for any populists this would certainly be ‘the people’, it is actually important to consider how other subgroups might be taking centre stage: we have seen this with the anti-

Muslim discourse of the populist radical right, which often posits women as specific victims in need of protection (see e.g., Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015, 33).

As further detailed in the theory chapter (Chapter 3), the relationship of insecurity serves as a conceptual framework for studying to what extent the PRL engages in dynamics of threat construction and whether these follow a similar logic and strategy as their radical right counterparts.

The end product of communicating (in)security can be seen as a security imaginary. The concept of 'security imaginary' originates from the IR scholarship and denotes how national identities can be constructed by foreign and security policy, via the demarcation between the inside and the outside, the threatened nation and the threatening others (Campbell 1992). As Georg Löfflmann (2021) points out, the logic of the security imaginary draws from a Schmittian vision of politics as a struggle between friends and enemies. In the case of populism, the subject of the security imaginary is the threatened populist constituency which is pitted against a number of 'others', such as elites, the media or the institutions of liberal democracy (ibid.). For Löfflmann (2021) the construction of a security imaginary by nationalist populists such as Donald Trump results in a reframing of national identity. In homogenising the needs and will of the people, populists conflate the insecurities of their own constituencies with that of the entire nation, hence reframing national identity as popular identity, first and foremost.

As a conceptual tool, the security imaginary helps understand how framing relationships of insecurity builds a particular vision over contemporary risks. This comes to life in narrative form, as a story where the main characters are a) the villain elites, b) the victimised people and c) usually a populist hero capable of restoring safety. The security imaginary also helps unpack how these narrative dynamics can

become tools to construct the identity of the victims in opposition to the villains. Therefore the concept of a security imaginary can be used as a set of ideational resources that allow political actors to both delineate their vision of security dynamics and identity construction.

Overall, using this constructivist and communication-oriented approach, captured by the 'relationship of insecurity', allows us to extend the available scholarship on populism and (in)security without normatively judging what should or should not be regarded as a security issue. The concept frees the meaning of security from its exclusive association with certain themes rather than others and prompts the researcher to leave aside any presupposition on what constitutes security and what does not.

2.5. Security and the populist radical left: a literature gap

The literature reviewed so far shows that individual ontological insecurities produced by structural and long-term trends are significant factors that provide fertile ground for populist success. However, the question of how populists capitalise, address or counter such insecurities in their political messages, has been overwhelmingly posed having the radical right in mind.

As mentioned earlier, as well as in the Introduction (Chapter 1), there is an affinity between the populist radical right and security, in terms of security 'content' and security 'talk'. In terms of 'content', this variety of populism owns themes such as crime and law and order (Mudde 2010) that are traditionally associated with security - provided that security is understood in a limited way, as relating to the domain of national or domestic security. Hence, security is seen as the 'monopoly of the right'. In

terms of ‘talk’, the populist radical right constructs outsiders as existential threats, hence embracing the language of insecurity. As a consequence, ‘security talk’ has become a synonym for questionable or opportunistic rhetoric aimed at sowing fear, scapegoating minorities and fostering ‘otherisation’ processes (Wodak 2015). To put it differently, narratives on insecurity seem to automatically echo exclusionary and nativist messages.

From this perspective, the PRL escapes any links with security because, in terms of content, the topic seems out of place within an ideology centred around the socio-economic dimension (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013b); and in terms of talk, because the PRL is not perceived to be an exclusionary force as the radical right. However, divisions between security on one hand and economic issues on the other are at best ‘artificial’ (Homolar 2010), because although they may lend to a distinct analytical examination, they still operate within the same reality and “it simply does not make sense to consider them in isolation” (Palan and Petersen 2015).

As this literature review has shown, we can leave these assumptions behind by approaching security from a constructivist perspective, without pre-assigning meanings to the concept. Once we do this, we can start unpacking how and to what extent the PRL incorporates narratives around contemporary insecurity in its political message, and whether this can help us better understand populism’s ideational structure.

In the following subsections, I discuss how the existing literature on the PRL may help us hypothesise how the content and features of the relationship of insecurity constructed by the PRL may look like. Specifically, I discuss how current insights on the relevance of crisis for the PRL allows us to develop expectations about a predominance of political and economic insecurity in the discourse of these actors.

Second, I explore how the existing scholarship on postmaterialist values suggests that the PRL may also pay particular attention to other forms of contemporary insecurity, such as the climate threat. Finally, I show how the current debate on classic radical left vs. populist concepts (e.g., class vs the people, neoliberalism vs the elites) helps us formulate further hypotheses on the main characters of the relationship of insecurity (i.e., the danger vs. the endangered).

2.5.1. From crisis to insecurity

The concept of ‘crisis’ is relevant for understanding the conditions of the emergence of the PRL in different phases of its evolution. According to Giorgos Katsambekis and Alexandros Kioupkiolis (2019), the crisis of social democracy, with its shifts towards the centre and endorsement of liberalism, opened the way for a ‘first wave’ of radical left populist parties, such as Die Linke in Germany or the Socialist Party in the Netherlands. After the 2008 financial crash, this crisis of representation was pushed further to the extreme in some European countries, especially those hit more by the recession, favouring the emergence of a ‘second wave’ of radical left populists, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain (Kioupkiolis 2016). The relevance of the concept of crisis for populist success has also been highlighted in the work of Moffitt (2015), who argued that, besides being exogenous factors that provide fertile ground for populism to thrive, crises can also be endogenously constructed and performed by populist actors themselves.

Although these works do not explicitly address issues of security and insecurity, their focus on crises reveals how the latter display an important insecurity component.

In this respect, I propose we can discern four ways in which crises and insecurity intertwine:

- A crisis (whether actual or perceived) is the background context against which the enemification of relationships takes place (Taggart 2004); populists therefore tap into a language of insecurity by depicting the world as constituted by either friends or foes and by pitting the people against a series of enemies.
- Crises can also be considered as resulting from processes of threat construction: “by constantly evoking insecurity, security discourse produces a constant state of emergency” - crisis is therefore the “ontological by-product of the political concern with security” (Bubandt 2005: 280).
- A crisis is a moment of rupture that signals a condition of vulnerability for all those that can be affected by it, consequentially heightening concerns, uncertainties and anxieties about its outcomes (Capelos and Exadaktylos 2017).
- Crises are often narrated with the language of natural disasters and managed with policy plans that echo disaster response, thus invoking a shared sense of threat and trauma in the population (Brassett and Clarke 2012).

The concept of crisis is thus relevant to understanding insecurity both as a structural cause and a persuasive means to antagonise ‘the people’ against some perceived ‘enemies’. However, it is used by some to distinguish right and left populism on the basis that “the former usually portray it as a migration or security crisis” whereas “left-wing populisms most often locate the crisis in the socio-economic order” (Katsambekis and Kioupiolis 2019, 9), still perpetuating an idea of security as not applicable to the issues owned by the PRL.

As argued earlier, here we leave such assumptions behind and use the idea of crisis to develop hypotheses about insecurity construction. Given that the crisis of representation and the economic crisis are considered the core triggers for the emergence of the European PRL, we can expect these forms of insecurity (i.e., political and economic) to be privileged in its discourse. Hence by adopting a broadened understanding of insecurity, we can immediately see that the PRL may in theory and practice be concerned with it in particular domains.

2.5.2. Other types of insecurity

Contrary to more conservative communist parties, the European radical left has generally embraced the relevance of postmaterialist values and the 'new left' agenda (March 2012). Although still interested in the economic dimensions, these parties do not interpret the social conflict solely in materialist terms. The PRL, in particular, places emphasis on the principles of social justice, democracy, civil rights, pacifism, feminism, ecologism and sovereigntism - although different parties prioritise these values differently in their own ideological structure (Damiani 2020, 52-54). Moreover, the modernisation crisis of post-industrial societies has produced a context where new forms of insecurity have emerged (Betz 1994).

Hence, as the relevance of new concerns has gained ground, I hypothesise that the insecurity narratives of the PRL may centre on different types of insecurity than economic anxieties. This means that these parties may mobilise narratives of environmental, military and wider societal insecurity because these broad security domains touch upon the values the parties cherish. Issues such as climate change, military intervention, or limitations to rights and liberties, are all themes that may be

addressed with an insecurity lens, constructing relationships of insecurity between what produces such threats and who/what is affected by them.

2.5.3. The enemies of the left

Although the PRL does not use exclusionary language to establish the boundaries of belonging to 'the people', it can still refer to elites with a discourse infused by insecurity and enmity, as shown by recent work on the French case (Bonansinga 2022; see also: discussion below). Generally, as Kioupkiolis (2016) puts it, the anger and fear of left populism are directed at elites rather than immigrants.

As the literature shows, 'elites' is a derogatory term often applied to a variety of political, social and economic actors. Oftentimes, it refers to the political 'establishment' or 'the caste', as parties such as Podemos, La France Insoumise or hybrid populists such as the Five Stars Movement labelled it. Scholars have also highlighted that for the PRL it is particularly the rich, the 'oligarchy', finance, and corporations that represent the elites and hence the enemy of the people (Wajner 2021). International powers and organisations, such as the US or NATO, are also considered the embodiment of elites, because they allegedly exploit an illegitimate power at the expense of innocent people (Wehner and Thies 2020). While this has been traditionally seen in Latin American populism, a fierce rejection of NATO is also present in the discourse of the European PRL, which extends the label 'elites' to further multilateral bodies such as the EU (Bonansinga 2022; March 2012).

As I have shown in some recent work on Jean-Luc Mélenchon and La France Insoumise, the idea of enmity links very intimately with the idea of insecurity (Bonansinga 2022). This is because, in order to construct elites as enemies, populists

rely on three main narratives of insecurity: they accuse elites of posing direct or indirect *threats* to the people (Wodak 2015), of bringing chaos and *uncertainty* to domestic and international politics (Kinnvall 2018; Moffit 2015), and of failing in their main duty to *protect* citizens (Wojczewski 2020). For example, Ivaldi (2019) has noted that in France the PRL leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon makes increasing use of aggressive rhetoric depicting the EU as a threat to the French people, and revolving around the language of defence and protection of the homeland. This is further in line with other studies finding that nationalism and nationalist themes are becoming paramount in the populist left (Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods 2017).

If the relationship of insecurity that the PRL builds is to be first and foremost populist, I expect the elites - in all their various forms - to be identified as the main sources of insecurity. On the contrary, if the relationship of insecurity is mostly informed by their radical left ideology, we can expect the sources of insecurity to be less *personified* in the form of elites, with the finger to be pointed at factors rather than actors. This would mean, for instance, that capitalism or neoliberalism would appear more recurrently as sources of insecurity than their corresponding 'elites'.

2.5.4. Who or what is in danger

The literature suggests a friction at the heart of the European PRL when it comes to appealing to its main audiences. As populists, these actors appeal to a vague, inclusionary 'people' that emphasises identity (March 2012). As radical left actors, however, they are also concerned about class conflict and how class intersects with other issues, such as ecologism and social justice (ibid.). There has indeed been a significant shift within the radical left towards populist appeals, with emerging parties

such as Podemos in Spain presenting a clear populist profile (Kioupkiolis 2016) and established actors such as Mélenchon in France gradually embracing it (Chiocchetti 2020; Marlière 2019).

Similarly to the previous sections, I propose two key expectations on how these dynamics may interplay with the construction of insecurity. If populism is the dominant ideational resource that informs the construction of insecurity, I would expect that ‘the people’ will be the main subject identified as being affected by it. On the contrary, if the relationship of insecurity is informed by a radical left ideology, we can expect more specific concepts relating to class, such as the appeal to workers, to be identified as under attack.

2.6. Summary

To unpack the nexus between populism and (in)security, this chapter has firstly set out its understanding of both concepts. In particular, it has stressed that insecurity is not an a priori concept to categorise themes, but rather a multifaceted construct whose specific meanings (e.g., danger, uncertainty, safety, protection) are made intelligible to the wider public via communication.

The chapter has shown that, although utilising different terms and diverse labels, the existing scholarship has noted that populists engage in the construction of insecurity via processes of framing that help build particular narratives around the status of insecurity in contemporary societies. However, extant knowledge is limited in its understanding of the relationship between (in)security and populism because of its empirical focus on right-wing politics. As this thesis aims to uncover whether insecurity is an ideational resource that is crucial to all populisms regardless of their ideological

orientation, this chapter has suggested retaining some key aspects of extant studies to build a simplified and comparable framework to understand how insecurity construction works in the PRL (vis-à-vis the PRR). This framework suggests tracing how *relationships of insecurity* are discursively built and communicated in the context of the PRL. This concept refers to the framing of insecurity as the result of a relational dynamic between who/what produces insecurity and who/what is affected by it. The idea that insecurity construction results from relational processes of framing is a key insight emerging from this literature review.

Further insights have been generated by analysing what we currently know about left populism more broadly and the PRL more specifically, in order to develop preliminary expectations of how this relational process may look like when constructed and articulated by this type of political actors, specifically in relation to a) the type of insecurity they may mobilise, b) the actors and factors they may identify as producers of insecurity, and finally c) the 'peoples' and subgroups that may be deemed in danger.

Overall this chapter has defined the thesis' understanding of populism and insecurity, and the relationship between the two concepts. It has highlighted what aspects of the existing literature it builds on in order to meet its aim to investigate the construction of insecurity in the PRL. The next chapter will formalise the theoretical framework and hypotheses that have been preliminarily formulated here and discuss more at length how it plans to uncover whether insecurity is inherently an ideational resource for all types of populism.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

The literature reviewed in the previous chapter sets the stage for the present research. On the one hand, political psychology research on ontological insecurities (Kinnvall 2018; Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen 2018) has shown that contemporary anxieties are multifaceted and intertwine with a wide range of issues - from the economy to identity or the environment - that clearly go beyond the concern for physical safety traditionally associated with the meaning of 'security'. On the other hand, political science studies link contemporary insecurity with populist success, arguing that the populist right capitalises on citizens' anxieties with discourses of fear (Wodak 2015), crisis (Homolar and Scholz 2019; Moffitt 2015), insecurity (Béland 2020) and securitisation (Kinnvall 2014; Kurylo 2020; Wojczewski 2020) that enhance their resonance and success. In doing so, these studies have largely neglected whether the discursive dynamics of threat construction work differently in the populist radical left (PRL) narratives or whether there is a more profound ideational interconnection between populism and (in)security that transcends the ideological divide.

Based on these gaps, I have posed the following research questions (as anticipated in the Introduction, Chapter 1):

RQ1: How do political parties and leaders espousing radical left populism interpret and communicate (i.e., *frame*) (in)security in their external communication?

- RQ1.1: Are their (in)security narratives predominantly shaped by populist ideas or their radical left ideology?

RQ2: Why does the populist radical left engage with the politics of insecurity (if this is widely associated with their - often loathed - radical right competitor)? Is it a matter of ideas or strategy?

While adhering to the view of the politics of insecurity as a process of framing (Béland 2020; Huysmans 2006), I here propose extending and refining our understanding of this process as entailing a set of frames. This will allow a more fine-grained analysis of the communication dynamics that concern insecurity in populist discourse.

This chapter presents a theoretical model to capture the (in)security frames that will be used for answering the descriptive research question (RQ1 and RQ1.1). It then develops the concept of *relationships of insecurity* to explain the relational dynamic that insecurity frames establish between the danger and the endangered subjects. The section on hypotheses sets the theoretical expectations for the study, discussing them in the wider framework of the theoretical debate known in the literature as the '*populism trumps ideology*' and '*ideology trumps populism*' theses (March 2017, 284-85).

3.2 The populist politics of insecurity beyond threats

In theorising how the PRL performs a politics of insecurity at the communication level, I start from two assumptions. First, that security entails a variety of meanings (for a review: Bourbeau 2015), as shown in the Literature Review Chapter (e.g. security as managing threats, security as protection, etc), and second, that security and insecurity are the mirror of each other (Burgess 2019). Following these premises, I theorise that similarly to security, insecurity also takes up several meanings.

Although agreeing that the politics of insecurity entails a process of framing (Béland 2020), I argue that 'framing threats' is not the only way that insecurity can be infused in communication. As Jef Huysmans (2006, 3) argued, making threats the kernel of security "is too one-dimensional".

Like security, insecurity assumes a variety of meanings that are not necessarily centred around the 'presence of danger'. Hence the idea of **threat** is all but one face of insecurity. This idea relates to the meaning of 'security' as 'safety', hence as the absence of (or freedom from) danger; as a consequence, being its opposite, insecurity comes to be associated with risks, perils and menaces. The populist right has been found to adopt this narration, especially in regard to minorities (eg. migrants or homosexuals), by portraying them as *threats to something*, most commonly the heartland (Wodak 2015).

However, an additional meaning that insecurity can assume is that of **uncertainty**. This is because security is also a condition of predictability which assures certainty and stability. Hence we do not evoke insecurity only when talking about danger but also when we underline how uncertain, precarious or unstable a certain referent object is or will become (Kinnvall 2018).

The politics of insecurity can also be performed with discursive emphases on **protection**. When we claim that something needs protecting, we are essentially (although indirectly) stating that a condition of insecurity of some sort surrounds it. As Bohdana Kurylo (2020) argues, the populist tendency to stress 'the need to preserve' the ingroup represents a distinct way in which security discourse becomes embedded in populist communication. The narrative on 'defending the homeland' or 'protecting our women' by well-known populist radical right parties has often been discussed in terms of perpetuating insecurity (Kinnvall 2014).

Finally, insecurity can be expressed **by association** with widely established insecurity themes. When a narrator links a certain issue to insecurity themes such as crimes, wars or disasters, insecurity can *transfer* (Huysmans 2006, 4). To put it differently, when audiences are invited to make certain links and associations in their

minds, insecurity can ‘spill over’ from one theme to the other. As a result, a new issue, previously disconnected from the web of insecurity, can now be interpreted in novel (insecurity) terms.

Once we take into account these different ‘faces’ of insecurity, a more refined understanding of the ‘politics of insecurity’ starts shaping up, allowing us to better understand the communicative dynamics at the heart of populist insecurity discourse. I propose a framework that understands the construction of insecurity in verbal communication no longer as narrowed down to discourses of threat; but rather as a *set of frames* that embed insecurity in political narratives by providing interpretations centring not only on threats but also on uncertainty, the need for protection and the spillover of insecurity.

Below I summarise how these four key frames perform the politics of insecurity.

1. Insecurity as threat

This frame points at the presence of particular risks and posits **X as a threat (to Y)**. The key marker of this frame is a language revolving around ideas of threat, risk, harm and danger.

2. Insecurity as uncertainty

In this frame, **X means or generates uncertainty, instability, precarity (for Y)**. The key marker here is a language of diffuse uneasiness, which positions issues, actors and groups in a context of crisis, uncertainty, instability and precarity.

3. Insecurity as the need for protection

This frame denotes insecurity indirectly through references to protection. It can be seen as a 'passive' representation of danger that, rather than positing X as a risk to Y, shifts the attention to **Y as in need of protection from X**. The key marker of the frame uses the language of defence and preservation.

4. Insecurity by association

As the previous, this frame also denotes insecurity indirectly, this time by establishing a link between X and ideas that commonly evoke insecurity in everyday discourse. This key marker here is a language of catastrophe, disaster and destruction (e.g., X is a catastrophe for Y), or the widely established 'security' themes of crime, war and violence (e.g., X is criminal or X generates violence).

3.3. The relationship of insecurity

The frames we have just introduced embed insecurity in political narratives, because they favour an *interpretation* of stories, events or social issues as 'relationships of insecurity' (Bonansinga 2022). With this term, I refer to the rhetorical construction of the subject-object relation as one that positions them as the danger vs. the endangered. This is a specific way of interpreting phenomena and events, which depicts inimical, zero-sum-game relations in which X is not simply an 'issue' or a 'complex problem' but a source of insecurity for Y. Interpreting certain dynamics as relationships of insecurity is likely to impact how Xs are perceived, because the imaginary of menace can add more urgency and pressure to the need to 'solve' those problems and restore safety.

Behind the idea of the relationship of insecurity is the assumption that modern risks in our complex societies do need interpretation (Becks 1992) and for a variety of reasons, most notably because they are diffuse and it is often difficult to clearly trace their origins or identify their effects on different sectors of society. As Bethany Albertson and Shana Kushner Gadarian (2015, p. XXI) put it, these new insecurities “require more explanation from elites about why the public should be worried”. The need for mediated knowledge about these new social risks, which is dictated by the peculiar nature of the latter, gives an important tool and role to the actors who are capable of interpreting them (Adam and van Loon 2000).

In the framing contest at play in contemporary societies, where highly complex phenomena need to be unpacked for the public, relationships of insecurity favour particular interpretations of social reality. How can we identify them? I argue that when actors perform a politics of insecurity and use the frames that we have explored in the earlier section (insecurity as threat, insecurity as uncertainty, insecurity as the need for protection and insecurity by association), their communication assumes a precise structure. The narrative content is organised according to a ‘security rationale’ that posits ‘something’ as a source of insecurity to what consequently becomes an ‘endangered’ object.

To capture these elements, we can follow Monica Gariup’s approach (2016) in looking at security narratives through syntax, that is, the subject-object structure that organises and categorises verbal and written communication. My model captures the relationship of insecurity by identifying the contraposition built by insecurity frames. This means identifying:

1. The source of insecurity: the issue or actor that the speaker singles out as producing insecurity (be it in relation to ideas of danger, uncertainty, protection

or by association, as we have seen earlier). The source is the subject to a predicate of insecurity; for example, in the sentence 'climate change threatens humanity', climate change is the source of insecurity that responds to the question 'who threatens?'.

2. The affected by insecurity: the recipient of the menace; the speaker identifies it as the main actor or social group affected by insecurity. In syntax form, this is the object of the sentence, which answers the question 'who is threatened?' (in our previous example, 'humanity').

In summary, this research conceptualises the politics of insecurity as performed by actors via the communicative use of a set of insecurity frames. The way that these frames organise content builds a relationship of insecurity, that is an interpretation of the issue at hand as an inimical dynamic in which X is a source of existential insecurity for Y.

3.4. The security imaginary

Identifying relationships of insecurity gives us further insights into an actor's *security imaginary*. As discussed in Chapter 2, a security imaginary is an ideational resource that denotes the demarcation between the threatened and the threatening in International Relations theory (Campbell 1992; Löffmann 2021).

More generally, however, a security imaginary can be imagined as the narrative product of a relationship of insecurity, because the latter contributes to building a particular vision over contemporary risks. Here, the security imaginary is understood as that 'vision' coming to life in narrative form as a story of dangerous villains against innocent people. The contraposition of X against Y at the heart of the relationship of

insecurity suggests that its narrative product - the security imaginary - becomes a tool to understand how identity is constructed for victims in opposition to the villains.

Hence after capturing insecurity frames (step 1), establishing who or what is posited in a relationship of insecurity to another subject (step 2), the final step in my conceptual framework is understanding how a security imaginary becomes an ideational resource for political actors to both delineate their vision of security dynamics and identity construction.

3.5. The role of message packaging

Capturing the security imaginary requires locating relationships of insecurity in a broader context. As argued earlier, the security imaginary is the narrative product of constructing relationships of insecurity, hence in order to understand it, it is necessary to grasp what elements of the story appear recurrently and become dominant.

In this regard, media platforms play an important role. As each of them has specific settings and characteristics, political messages get to be articulated differently across different platforms. In the literature, these characteristics are called 'affordances' (Bossetta 2018) and denote the relational aspect of media use, because a platform's main affordances affect how users interact and behave. Twitter, for example, is notorious for a concise style of communication, because one of the platform's key affordances is the character limitation imposed on messages. This influences how users behave on the platform, as messages are crafted in ways that reduce the number of characters used and go straight to the point. Facebook, on the other hand, does not impose character limitations and its posts tend to be much lengthier than those appearing on Twitter. It is not uncommon for political actors to

actually cross-post between these two social media, linking a more articulate Facebook post on their Twitter feed for users to read on the other platform.

Different platforms and their message-packaging conventions can offer crucial insights into relationships of insecurity. Concise media such as Twitter are useful to grasp relationships of insecurity in their most basic and elementary way, as they are more likely to posit a simple and identifiable 'X is a threat to Y' message. More articulate platforms, not simply Facebook but also personal spaces such as blogs or more official outlets such as party magazines, can offer richer accounts of *how* 'X is a threat to Y'. This is because a more fine-grained narrative, made possible by lengthier discussions and articulations of a topic, can hint at the reasons *why* X is a threat, *how* it has become such, or *what* insecurity is causing to Y more specifically.

Hence taking into account the influence of packaging on political messages is theoretically relevant because it enables a rich reconstruction of insecurity narratives, while also generating insights on how these narratives can be micro-communicated. Considering the diversity of packaging means putting the theoretical model to the hard test, especially since this project is interested in understanding what ultimately drives the construction and performance of a politics of insecurity. I argue that examining the interplay of thin and thick ideologies in the context of the PRL is immediately tied to the examination of how ideas about insecurity are conceptualised, packaged and delivered to the public via a wide range of political messages.

3.6. Hypotheses

In examining the PRL's 'politics of insecurity', I start from a widely agreed assumption in the literature that the political messages of these actors are a manifestation of key

ideological stances (Reinemann et al. 2016; Kriesi 2014). Building on this, I draw on two important and still debated theses in the literature, which March (2017, 284-85) labels the *populism trumps ideology* vs. *ideology trumps populism* theses.

The *populism trumps ideology* thesis argues that, despite 'coloured' by diverging 'thick' ideologies, left and right populists are first and foremost populist; their ideological core, although 'thin', is on the people-elites struggle (Clark et al., 2008; Halikiopoulou et al. 2012; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2015). If populism trumps ideology (understood as thin ideology trumps thick ideology), we should expect a resemblance of PRL's narratives on insecurity to those of the PRR (**H1**). This means that the main components of the stories on insecurity will have clear 'populist' overlaps in terms of collective references to the 'people' as the 'affected' category and to 'elites' as the producers of insecurity. To put it differently, the relationship of insecurity that is established through framing would essentially underpin the people-elite struggle. The resulting narrative would be centred around the idea that the people's economic grievances, societal sense of dismay or political sense of loss would not exist without the elite creating this insecurity.

On the other hand, the *ideology trumps populism* thesis argues that, although their similar focus on the people vs elites struggle, the 'thick' ideological differences between populist actors remain hegemonic (Katsambekis 2017; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). Hence, it is the left-right divide and host ideologies that determine the 'content' attributed to the people and the elites and therefore the very essence of each strand of populism. If thick ideology trumps populism, we would expect the PRL's interpretations of contemporary insecurity to differ sharply from those of the radical right (**H2**). This would translate into the presence of clear distinctions in the main components of their narratives, with the PRL prioritising economic anxieties, blaming

economic and financial elites and centring their stories either on the people as demos or appealing to different social backgrounds more explicitly. This would run counter to the well-know PRR's narration of cultural threats, pitting cosmopolitan elites against the native population.

In summary, the PRL's narrative on insecurity is expected to be closer to the populist radical right under hypothesis 1 (populism trumps thick ideology), with people-centrism, anti-elitism and the reclaiming of popular sovereignty providing key content to the narrative. Under the alternative hypothesis 2 (thick ideology trumps populism), the narrative is expected to share similarities with the left tradition, as socialism and egalitarianism would provide distinctive content to the insecurity categories.

3.7. Value of the framework

The framework unpacks the politics of insecurity through the use of frames, which include but go beyond the focus on threats. By capturing the polysemy of insecurity, this framework allows us to pick up a variety of themes that populist actors interpret as (in)security-related but that would remain unintelligible under a threat-only framework. Moreover, the use of frames allows us to first, understand what *interpretation* of insecurity the PRL offers to the public (e.g., enemies as threatening vs people needing protection); and second, they allow us to track and map what *themes* emerge as sources of insecurity.

3.8. Summary

Following the literature review of Chapter 2 which examined the status of our knowledge of the relationship between (in)security and populism, this chapter has focused on what aspects of this scholarship can be retained and further expanded to study the populism-(in)security nexus as applied to the case of the PRL.

I have proposed a conceptualisation of the 'politics of insecurity' that takes into account the polysemy of insecurity and therefore the variety of frames through which populists can embed insecurity in their communication. These four frames allow us to identify what relationships of insecurity the PRL builds. Additionally, examining the relationships of insecurity to understand what endangers and what is in danger, enables us to delve into the PRL's security imaginary and to grasp its vision over contemporary insecurity. Overall, the empirical application of this theoretical framework allows us to gain insights into the politics of insecurity as performed by the PRL. To better understand why their insecurity narratives look the way they do, I also test two theses on whether it is the populist thin ideology or the host ideology that provides distinctive content to the insecurity narrative.

In the next chapter, I present the case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and La France Insoumise as the best test for this framework and hypotheses.

Chapter 4: Case Study and Method

4.1. Introduction

As discussed so far, this research revolves around two questions of descriptive and exploratory character that aim at pushing the boundaries of our knowledge on the relationship between the populist radical left (PRL) and (in)security.

The first question revolves around the discursive engagement with the politics of insecurity by political actors espousing radical left populism. This question looks at the content of the PRL's narratives on (in)security. It aims at unpacking the discursive dynamics at play when these actors approach the topic of contemporary insecurity and articulate it in their external communication. Ultimately it aims to establish whether it is populist or radical left ideas that predominantly shape these narratives.

The second question asks why (i.e., for what reasons and functions) the PRL incorporates these narratives, when these messages are usually associated with the exclusionism of their right-wing counterparts. This question thus explores the strategic or ideological place that insecurity may hold within a PRL party's vision.

The project answers these research questions by undertaking two studies. In Study 1, a content analysis explores a variety of media platforms to understand whether and how the PRL communicates insecurity: what insecurity frames are mobilised? What relationships of insecurity are built? Who/what is represented as a source of insecurity? And who/what is posited as insecure? This will help answer RQ1 on how radical left populists interpret and communicate insecurity and what ideational resources shape these narratives, whether populist or radical left ideas. In Study 2, expert interviews with academics help generate informed hypotheses about party agency in the communication process: what do PRL parties aim to achieve? What

audiences are they targeting? How do their populist and leftist ideologies come together to shape their understanding of contemporary insecurity?

Empirically, the analysis focuses on the case of French political leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the party he founded in 2016 and currently leads, La France Insoumise (LFI, variously translated as Rebellious/Unsubmissive/Untamed France). This case was selected for three main reasons, which are discussed below: 1) their prototypical expression of radical left populism, 2) their contextual coexistence with the populist radical right (PRR) and 3) the crucial role they assign to their communication strategies.

First, Mélenchon and LFI represent a prototypical example of radical left populism and, as Chiocchetti (2020, 107) puts it, France is overall one of the most interesting case studies as it features both a strong tradition of left-wing radicalism and the emergence of a successful PRL party. The ideological core of LFI and Mélenchon is considered ‘populist’ because, as per Mudde’s (2004) definition, it revolves around the combination of people centrism, anti-elitism and the reclaiming of popular sovereignty (see next section, 4.2. ‘Populism and Leftism in Jean-Luc Melénchon and La France Insoumise’ for a detailed discussion). Important for the purpose of this research is that Mélenchon and LFI are examples of *radical left* populism. Their populist thin ideology comes attached to a host (or thick) ideology of eco-socialist-antineoliberal inspiration that is perfectly in line with the rest of the European radical left tradition (Chiocchetti 2020). Since populism has often been described as a fuzzy phenomenon or slippery concept, studying an established case is important because populist label attributions are often the object of debate and leave the academic community divided (an example is the cases of political leader Jeremy Corbyn in the UK or the Sinn Féin party in Ireland). Working on a case with conclusive evidence on

its radical left populist nature ensures that the key ideological variables under examination (people-centrism, anti-elitism and the reclaiming of popular sovereignty) are unambiguously applying to and representing the case. Moreover examining an 'established' case provides a solid theoretical basis for future research to extend this thesis' theoretical model to other political parties and leaders whose ideology similarly centres around people-centrism, anti-elitism and the reclaiming of popular sovereignty.

Moving on to the **second** selection criterion, Mélenchon and LFI are one of few rare cases in European politics in which a PRL actor coexists with a PRR counterpart. In the French case, the PRR is represented by the political party *Rassemblement National* (RN - National Rally, formerly known as *Front National*) associated with the leadership of the Le Pen family (Jean-Marie first, and Marine Le Pen later)³. This coexistence is important because it allows us to control for the context and political environment in which insecurity narratives take place to capture non-systemic factors. Keeping the context constant helps us better understand the *content* of the PRL's insecurity narratives, because it allows us to zoom into a particular event/phenomenon and compare how it is narrated by both the PRL and PRR. This, in turn, helps determine to what extent populist ideas vs host ideologies shape insecurity narratives.

The criterion of exclusionary-inclusionary populism coexistence in the same socio-political environment generates a small population that we could select from, most notably the cases of:

1. Germany, with *Die Linke* (The Left) and *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany);

³ As of November 2022, the party is led by Jordan Bardella

2. the Netherlands, with *Socialistische Partij* (Socialist Party) on the one hand and *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom) and *Forum voor Democratie* (Forum for Democracy) on the other;
3. Greece, with *Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás* (SYRIZA, Coalition of the Radical Left) and *Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós* (LAOS, Popular Orthodox Rally);
4. Spain, with *Podemos* (We Can) and *Vox* (Voice).

The case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, however, is the best case to study the populist politics of insecurity because of the privileged position that communication has at the heart of the leader's and party's strategy⁴. The focus on communication is a crucial, **third** selection criterion that puts the thesis' theoretical model to the hard test. The hard test is offered by the party's and its leader's use of a *variety* of media platforms where political messages are packaged very differently. This variety of packaging is important because it helps uncover:

- A. The micro dynamics of insecurity framing, as offered by messages on Twitter which are crafted based on the platform's renowned character limitations
- B. Richer narrative articulations, as offered by the leader's blog and the party newspaper editorials, which delve into key topics at length
- C. Explanations of *why* certain topics are interpreted as such, as offered by the pedagogic videos that Mélenchon shares on YouTube as part of his weekly series 'The Review of the Week (*La Revue de la Semaine*)'.

To put it differently, this party and its leader adopt a communication strategy that, by combining traditional written outlets, intensive use of social media posts and a novel

⁴ Although Podemos has similarly been studied for its focus on communication, its radical right counterpart Vox became a relevant political actor in Spain only starting from late 2018, when this project was already ongoing.

didactic approach on YouTube, allows us to simultaneously study rich narrative accounts and micro-communication dynamics, potentially alongside their mechanisms of interpretation.

Having briefly introduced the method, case and selection criteria for the purposes of this study, discussing them in detail is the task of the remaining sections of this chapter. The thesis treats the party and its leader as separate entities because of the particularity of the French political system: France is an exception to the mostly parliamentary Western Europe and its semi-presidential system gives centrality to both political leaders and parties (Cole 2003). This further strengthens the selection of this case study because, from a methodological point of view, treating parties and their leader as separate units enables the generation of a higher number of observations for the analysis.

4.2. Populism and Leftism in Jean-Luc Mélenchon and La France Insoumise

LFI is a French political party founded in February 2016 by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former senator and education minister for the Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste*, PS). Mélenchon stood as a presidential candidate in the 2017 presidential elections, after having campaigned for the position in 2012 for the *Front de Gauche* (FdG), the coalition of radical left parties that he formed after leaving the PS and founding the *Parti de Gauche* (Left Party, PG). The main features of their populism, as discussed below, are people-centrism, anti-elitism and the reclaiming of popular sovereignty in line with the available scholarship.

4.2.1. *The people*

Both Mélenchon's and LFI's discourse is centred around appeals to 'the people' (*les gens*), a vague reference often declined with different connotations but always characterised by the symbolic, material and political inclusivity suggested by Mudde and Kaltwasser as a key feature of populism on the left (2013a). Their discourse emphasises the people as *demos* (the ensemble of French citizens), a category depicted as deprived of their sovereignty by both the 'presidential monarchy' and the 'betrayal' of the Lisbon treaty, which imposed similar rules to what the French had refused in a referendum in 2005 (Soare and Stambazzi 2017). Alongside this conceptualisation, LFI and Mélenchon appeal to the people as the *underdog*, the ordinary citizens humiliated and deprived by the oligarchy (ibid.). It is worth noting that, although the people are not 'ethnicised' in the true sense of the term, Soare and Stambazzi (2017) argue that the 'people as *nation*' category is not absent altogether from LFI's or Mélenchon's discourse. Albeit the conception of the people here is certainly 'non-ethnic', as Castano (2018) remarks, French identity and traditions are still exalted through reference to foundational values such as freedom and equality; there is therefore an 'organic community' whose patrimony is emphasised and strongly defended that Soare and Stambazzi (2017) call a 'republican patriotism'.

4.2.2. *Anti-elitism*

Mélenchon and LFI characterize the country's political, financial and media elites as an 'oligarchic caste' of powerful people that dominates at the expense of the virtuous people (Birbaum, 2017; Castano 2018).

The *oligarchic* component of the caste is made of the ‘super-rich’ and the ‘golden finance’, while the *political* caste ‘serves’ them and the *media* caste assures their dominance with tricks and manipulations (Birbaum 2017). Their anti-elitism also travels beyond the domain of domestic politics: at the supranational level, it is embodied by the EU, represented as an ‘illegitimate system’ that ‘oppresses and subjugates the people’; at the international level, the critique shifts to the ‘exploitative’ NATO and IMF, alongside a series of ‘self-interested’ international powers who monopolise the international agenda (Chiocchetti 2020). This broad identification of outgroups is reflected in the findings by Gerstlé and Nai (2019), in which Mélenchon scored the highest in anti-elitism appeals during the 2017 presidential election.

Crucially, just as the recipient of Mélenchon’s discourse is addressed as a collective ‘one’ (*les gens* - the people, in plural), elites are grouped homogeneously (Ivaldi 2019). Matching closely the definition of populism, the antagonism that Mélenchon proposes is a moral struggle, as *all* elites are designated as evil, malign, immoral, greedy and exploitative (Chiocchetti 2020).

4.2.3. *The popular will*

According to Hamburger (2018), during the 2017 presidential campaign, Mélenchon and LFI united potential supporters under a new philosophy of insubordination and popular rage. This philosophy finds its main expression in two discursive nodal points that the 2017 party programme and leader’s speeches revolved around: on the one hand, the notion of ‘citizens’ insurrection’ that urged citizens to a ‘civic revolt’ against the system through voting, and on the other hand, the notion of *degagisme*, a French

expression borrowed from the Arab Spring riots that calls for the establishment to be 'cleared off' entirely (Marlière 2019).

Both these slogans summarise the action plan laid out by the party and its leader to regain popular sovereignty. The notion of citizens' insurrection relates to the act of voting for LFI but more importantly, it signifies the establishment of a new, 'sixth republic' following Mélenchon's election to the highest office. The 'sixth republic' would abolish what is labelled a 'presidential monarchy', which allegedly subjugates the French people to the power of a president-tyrant. The clearing-off of the political establishment (*degagisme*) would therefore lead to the restoration of a true 'republic'. Although tailored to the context, with evident emphasis on the French revolution and the values of republicanism, the two slogans match the populist ideational focus on the existence of a single popular will that is in contrast with the interests of the elites in power and that calls for their disposition.

4.2.4. Underpinning leftist ideology

A number of scholars have noticed a change in Mélenchon's understanding of the role of left-wing ideas in society. According to Marlière (2019), in the 2017 presidential election, Mélenchon strategically abandoned left-wing references in public discourse because he considered them to be 'empty and confusing' labels for the public. For instance, LFI's supporters were urged not to sing the Internationale or wave red flags, as part of an attempt to reunite a fragmented society under a simple message understandable for all. However, despite embracing populist ideas, leftism was never sidelined. Mélenchon and LFI do denounce an alleged state of crisis due to the nefarious effects of the elites' domination over the people and call for a 'civic revolution'

to get rid of the 'caste' (in clear populist key terms); however, they also put forward a vision of society inspired by left-wing ideals. As Chiocchetti (2020, 118) noted, Mélenchon's and LFI's programme for the 2017 elections was still "indisputably and radically left-wing".

The thick ideological content that underpins the thin-populist content is of the same ecological, socialist and anti-neoliberal inspiration that characterises the rest of the European PRL (ibid.). Mélenchon's and LFI's anti-neoliberalism revolves around a fierce critique of the capitalist system we live in and underpins a broader call for societal transformations that cuts across different aspects of societies, from the need to regulate the economy and reorganize of welfare, to dramatic changes in consumption patterns or democratic participation and political decision-making. Mélenchon's and LFI's thick ideology is also eco-socialist because it links the agenda of climate change prioritisation with state intervention, summarised in the programmatic expression of 'ecological planning' (LFI 2016) that dominated the campaign.

4.3. Populist left and right in France

Melenchon's success in the 2017 presidential elections (19%) and his improved performance in 2022 which led him to the third place with 22% (just behind Marine Le Pen's 23%), have played a significant role in reshaping the landscape of populist politics in France. In the country, populism has historically been linked to the radical right because of various populist movements and the presence of the increasingly successful Front National (FN, now Rassemblement National, RN - Baloge and Hubé 2022). With the arrival of LFI, the French populist scene is now split between these

two ideologically diverging actors. In this section, we examine French radical right populism and why it is important to select a case where competing populisms co-exist.

4.3.1 The FN

The FN, now RN, is a prototypical PRR party as defined by Mudde (2007), in that it combines populism with authoritarianism (i.e., the beliefs in a strictly ordered society) and nativism (i.e., the beliefs that natives should have priorities in all aspects of social life). According to Ivaldi (2019) FN was also an 'archetypical' PRR party because it is among the most longevous in Europe, having been established in 1972. Contrary to assumptions in populism research that the rise and fall of PRR parties would be inevitably tied to their charismatic founders/leaders, FN survived a crucial leadership transition which included the ousting of the party founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen. Led by his daughter Marine Le Pen from 2011 to 2022, the party has undergone a process of de-demonisation, to distance itself from the extremist positions that it was associated with under the previous leadership (Ivaldi 2016).

As for other PRR parties, insecurity plays an important role in the FN's and its leader's rhetoric and the two are associated with firm securitarian discourse (Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods 2017). This thesis' conceptual framework is useful to illuminate the variety of ways in which the FN engages with the politics of insecurity. There is first of all a language of threat and peril (what has been defined here as 'insecurity as threat') mostly used to identify 'dangerous Others', such as immigrants which are depicted as 'threats to national identity' or Islam which is posited as a 'menace to society'. FN and Le Pen also use the language of defence and preservation (i.e., 'insecurity as the need for protection') to portray a France 'in need of protection' from

‘invasion and submersion by migrants’ (e.g., Le Pen 11 March 2017, speech in Chateauroux). The portrayal of political elites as a ‘mafia’, of media and intellectuals as ‘weapons of war against the popular will’ and of the EU as a ‘crime against democracy’ can all be interpreted through the lenses of ‘insecurity by association’ in which the widely established security-themes of crime and war are employed to construct elites as sources of insecurity (see also Bonansinga 2021). Finally, the emphasis on economic precarity and portrayal of France as in a state of ‘profound identity, security, economic and social crises’ (e.g., Le Pen, 2 April 2017, speech in Bordeaux) clearly tap into the language of ‘insecurity as uncertainty’.

4.3.2. The importance of coexistence

As we mentioned earlier, France is one of few cases in Western Europe where two successful but ideologically divergent populist parties coexist. The possibility to simultaneously observe PRL’s and PRR’s narratives on insecurity is crucial because this project is not solely interested in how the PRL engages with the politics of insecurity but also in how the populist thin ideology and the leftist thick ideology come together to shape the PRL’s insecurity narratives. Ultimately the thesis is interested in understanding whether populism or the attached host ideology is the dominant ideational resource that guides a populist party’s interpretation of contemporary insecurity.

The presence of a competing exclusionary populism is important because it provides us a benchmark for comparison. This means we can *zoom* into the narratives of a PRR party while keeping the context in which PRR and PRL operate analytically equivalent. By matching a PRL actor with a coexisting PRR equivalent, the project can

isolate their thin-populist core and observe how they discuss the same issue(s). Hence the presence of a PRR party allows us to spot divergences and overlaps between competing populist narratives and understand the role of people-centrism, anti-elitism and popular sovereignty in shaping insecurity narratives.

As explained later (Section 4.5. Research Design), the thesis equally zooms into the narratives of the mainstream left to isolate the contribution of left-wing ideas to the interpretation of insecurity. Before delving into research design in more detail, the next section concludes the discussion on case selection by exploring the third and last criterion.

4.4. The focus on communication

While the first two selection criteria narrow the population of available cases, the focus on communication points at Mélenchon and LFI as a key case for studying the framing processes involved in the construction of insecurity. This is because, according to many scholars, Mélenchon and LFI set themselves apart from other political actors in terms of skilfully crafted communication strategies⁵ (Castano 2018, Cautrès 2017; Chiocchetti 2020; Marlière 2019). In this section, we discuss the strategic importance of external communication for Mélenchon and LFI and their variegated use of media platforms.

Mélenchon and LFI have showed a willingness from the very start to circumvent traditional media, skilfully harnessing the power of new platforms and technologies (Castano 2018), while also conducting a traditional campaign on the ground that

⁵ As argued earlier, Podemos could also have been a key case in this regard, but the relevance of a radical right counterpart in that context only emerged in late 2018 when this project had already started.

focused on mass meetings, the mobilisation of young people and door-to-door 'listening' campaigns (Hamburger 2018). This strategy originates from Mélenchon's own stormy relationship with the media and the consequential necessity to circumvent traditional logics to get the political message across. For scholars, their 2017 presidential campaign was very successful precisely because of the chosen communication strategy, including the type of language, the themes mobilised, the form of meetings and the strong presence on social media (Cautrès 2017).

Overall the party and its leader have introduced a novel focus on strategic communication that still characterises the party's outreach activities to date. The strategy entails the exclusive reliance on their own written outlets, the extensive focus on social media and a novel form of 'pedagogic' communication (Eyriès 2018). This unique blend of media use makes Mélenchon and LFI a desirable case for this type of research because their communication strategy entails a multi-faceted packaging of political messages, as I show below, that puts the thesis' theoretical framework to the hard test.

First, Mélenchon and LFI exclusively rely on their own written outlets. The party's newspaper is called *L'Heure du Peuple* (The Hour of the People) and its mission is to "decipher the news" and "investigate the roots of the major social, economic and ecological problems of our time" (<https://heuredupeuple.fr>)⁶. The newspaper has been active since 1979, the year of its foundation by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Additionally, Mélenchon posts regularly on his blog since 2005, making it one of the very first blogs to be run by a politician in France (Thérond 2020). His blog, *L'Ere du Peuple* (The Era of the People - www.melenchon.fr) is updated with a variety of content that includes

⁶ More recently, the newspaper has been rebranded and renamed *L'Insoumission Hebdo* (The Weekly Insubordination)

traditional posts, his weekly YouTube series 'The Review of the Week' (discussed below), his books and videos from his work in parliament. From a communication analysis perspective, these two platforms offer a traditional, written and detailed account of the leader's and party's vision on a large number of topics. The message here is packaged as a long, articulated text that unpacks and interprets everyday news stories and events for a larger audience of supporters. For the purpose of this research, these outlets thus offer an excellent platform for examining framing processes as they allow for a **rich and fine-grained reconstruction** of political narratives.

Second, Mélenchon and LFI have separate Twitter accounts, which they use to give space to one another by sharing each other's posts, showcasing their work and media presence. They also use Twitter as a tool to increase the visibility of their other platforms, for instance linking to Mélenchon's blog articles, the party's newspapers or their YouTube channels. Through Twitter hashtags, in particular, they allow audiences to follow meetings, events or particular subjects. Overall their Twitter content takes a variety of forms, from video excerpts of campaign events and media appearances, to written reflections and statements on chosen topics (Mercier 2017). Given its structure centred around a limit on characters, Twitter is used for the circulation of condensed messages. As Twitter is an established arena for political communication (Jungherr 2017), looking at this platform is useful to understand how messages about insecurity are crafted in a much more simplified way compared to longer and more articulate texts. Hence Twitter is an essential platform to uncover the **micro-dynamics** of framings involved in the performance of the politics of insecurity.

Finally, Mélenchon uses YouTube as a platform to offer a detailed articulation of his political vision (Castano 2018). His use of YouTube finds a consensus among

scholars about the innovative character of this communication strategy (Castano 2018; Therond 2020). As with other social media platforms, YouTube helps bypass the logic, timing and airtime of traditional media. However, its use enabled him and the party a) to make speeches available to citizens across France, regardless of their physical attendance of rallies (Mercier 2017); b) to live-stream speeches thus guaranteeing everyone a live experience; c) to revolutionise meeting attendance by using 'holograms' to address more rallies simultaneously (Marlière 2019). This strategy set Mélenchon and LFI apart from other parties as they became the only candidate and political formation to have a YouTube channel, forcing other leaders to follow suit (Castano 2018; Mercier 2017). With well over 800.000 subscribers as of February 2023, Melenchon's performance on YouTube is now a record for any French political actor (Therond 2020). Of importance for this research is the weekly appointment on his channel called 'The Review of the Week' in which Mélenchon discusses at length some key topics, most notably issues that are particularly hot on the French political debate. Several scholars have highlighted the 'pedagogic' approach of these talks, as Mélenchon proposes scholarly-type explanations on how politics should work, which are far from the aggressiveness often displayed during media appearances or the presidential debates; in this platform, he combines a direct and simple language with more refined rhetoric (Castano 2018; Chiocchetti 2020; Therond 2020; Wormser 2017). Similarly to the blog and newspaper seen earlier, here the message is also packaged in a detailed and articulated way, as episodes last on average between 30 minutes and one hour. However what sets apart this platform from the written outlets is the focus on explanation. While the Review of the Week can give us a window into a detailed narrative - as the written outlets do -, it can also give us access to the **mechanisms of interpretation** that lead the speaker to interpret certain issues the

way he does. In other words, while the previous platforms help uncover both micro dynamics of framing (Twitter) and rich narrative accounts (blogs and editorials), the pedagogic style of explanations used here extends those findings with additional details on how and why certain frames, certain links between phenomena came to be understood as such.

4.5. Research design

Mélenchon and his party LFI represent what the theory calls a 'key case', with a strong capacity to illuminate the object of analysis and provide us with exemplary knowledge (Thomas 2010; 2011). Overall the case study design is one of the most established research strategies in the social sciences (Gerring 2004) and although it often places the researcher in front of a dilemma between explanation and generalisation, it offers a unique opportunity to delve into the complexity of the case to produce rich insights. For the purpose of this research, it was deemed the most appropriate design, given the understudied profile of the PRL in Europe and the necessity to build extensive and rich accounts of how and why this variant of the populist ideology intertwines with the politics of insecurity. In the context of this project, the case study design represents an effort in both theory testing and theory seeking, as it applies and tests existing theoretical insights (stemming from the study of the PRR, as seen in Chapter 2: Literature Review) on actors espousing a PRL ideology; at the same time, the in-depth examination of Mélenchon and LFI will produce crucial preliminary findings that will allow to formulate hypotheses on the populism-insecurity nexus and on the distinctiveness of left populism vis-à-vis the populist right.

This project treats Mélenchon and LFI as two distinct units for several reasons. First, I take into account the exceptionalism of the French political system that, due to its semi-presidential structure, gives centrality to both parties and leaders (Cole 2003). Second, I consider the short life of the party and the lack of conclusions in the literature as to whether it truly represents a case of ‘personal party’ (McDonnell 2013); therefore I refrain from considering the party a mere tool for its leader and I avoid conflating them. Finally, separating the party and the leader allows to generate a higher number of observations which is important for hypothesis-testing in case studies. I also examine their external communication from the debut at the 2017 presidential elections to the end of 2020, similarly as part of a research strategy to generate a high number of observations and produce a greater variety of data.

To strengthen hypothesis-testing, I also introduce a comparative element *within* the case, using the year 2020 to assess how the narratives of Mélenchon and LFI stack up against those of the PRR (*Rassemblement National*) and of the mainstream left (*Parti Socialiste*). This process of ‘matching’ uses two dimensions: the populism dimension and the left/right positioning. This entails comparing the PRL’s politics of insecurity with a non-populist left party (criteria: Left-Left / Populist vs. Non-populist) and a populist radical right party (criteria: Populist-populist / Left vs. right).

Table 4.1: Matching criteria

	Populist	Non-populist
Left	La France Insoumise	Parti Socialiste

	Left	Right
Populist	La France Insoumise	Rassemblement National

Matching the PRL case along the populism dimension means that it is compared with an actor that is equally populist but oppositely positioned on the political spectrum (populism-populism, left-right). This is represented by the case of *Rassemblement National*. Matching the PRL case along the left-right dimension means that it is compared with an actor that is equally leftist but does not share a populist thin ideology (left-left, populism-nonpopulism). This is represented by *Parti Socialiste*. This matching strategy is important for two main reasons: first, it allows to isolate the ideological variables of interest (i.e., thin and thick ideologies) and to proceed with a focused comparison within the chosen case; second, it enables to observe the similarities and differences between the insecurity narratives put forward by the PRL, the PRR and the mainstream left. In sum, this matching strategy generates an 'insecurity rhetoric benchmark' against which the discourse of Mélenchon and his party can be compared and assessed.

The year 2020 represents an ideal time frame for this focussed-comparison, because of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which plunged France, Europe and the rest of the world into a spiral of death that for months countries were unable to halt or manage. A context of this type is useful to compare how political parties understand and construct insecurity because it provides us with a baseline: an insecurity-provoking event that unfolded for the entire year. Hence this context allows us to compare how thin and thick ideologies shape the way the PRR and mainstream left interpreted and made sense of the pandemic, with an eye to the differences and similarities with LFI.

As anticipated at the start of this chapter, the thesis undertakes two studies in order to answer the research questions. The next two sections provide details on the

chosen research methods, while the subsequent part of the chapter delves into the research procedure before closing with some epistemological reflections.

4.6. Study 1 - Content analysis of insecurity narratives

Study 1 answers the first research question and its broad aim is to understand how the thin and thick ideological features characteristic of the PRL give content to their narratives on insecurity. To fulfil this aim, the themes that are interpreted and presented as sources of insecurity need to be identified. This is achieved by applying the ‘politics of insecurity’ communication model (presented in Chapter 3: Theory) to the selected case. More specifically, by translating the communication model into precise and mutually exclusive coding categories for a content analysis of Mélenchon’s and LFI’s external communication.

Content analysis is the appropriate method for this study because it is the most established, authoritative method “for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff 2004, 18). It suits research into the meaning, forms and contents of political communication, such as the present thesis. This method is widely established in social and political research⁷ to capture trends, similarities or differences in the communication process, as it is overall aimed at developing an understanding of the meaning of communication (Cavanagh 1997; Krippendorff 1989). In the context of this research, it allows to extract and analyse the insecurity framing, type and the relationship of insecurity in order to determine the overall engagement of

⁷ In populism research, it is used prominently to establish whether a certain actor is a populist (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mazzoleni and Bracciale 2018); it is used to understand the specific variety of populism at hand (e.g. Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone 2018; March 2017); and it is also important for illuminating how populists discuss certain themes, from crisis narratives (Homolar and Scholz 2019) to the state of the economy (Mols and Jetten 2016) to name a few.

the selected case with the politics of insecurity. It is best suited to answer the descriptive research question(s) (RQ1 and 1.1) precisely because it produces reliable inferences about the importance that certain concepts, themes, representations or frames hold in specific communications.

I performed the content analysis manually with a deductive approach which applies coding categories derived from the theoretical framework (Chapter 3). This theory-driven approach has allowed me to develop a codebook that gives clear instructions to ensure categories are applied systematically. One of the main critiques towards manual content analysis indeed revolves around the potential conflicts of interpretation due to human coding, which impact the reliability and replicability of findings. However, as Krippendorff (1989) recommends, the creation and systematic application of observer-independent codebooks is the best tool at the researcher's disposal to address this weakness of the method. Moreover, I combine human coding with a software-based text search to ensure further objectivity.

Overall, a content analysis of Mélenchon's and LFI's external communication is still the most appropriate strategy to pursue in the context of this study, because of its strengths and advantages highlighted in this section: indeed this method assures an objective approach to the coding procedure, allows for a systematic treatment of text units, supports reliable findings, has an established position in communication research and is also flexible to different research designs.

The categories emerging from the content analysis are also examined by means of a qualitative analysis, which allows delving into the *content* of insecurity narratives. While the content analysis identifies the main elements that compose insecurity narratives, a qualitative analysis is necessary to bring those elements together and understand the *story* they tell. The qualitative analysis was performed by closely

reading each text and zooming into the relationships of insecurity identified at the content analysis stage to understand them in context and in relation to one another.

In summary, my research strategy, which combines a software-based text search with manual coding and a qualitative analysis, allows me to automatically isolate insecurity-relevant texts and to qualitatively assess and examine insecurity narratives. Although content analysis presents methodological limitations, especially in relation to manual and human coding, I have purposefully blended an automated text search and a theory-driven codebook to minimise conflicting interpretations of data and ensure a systematic application of coding categories.

4.7. Study 2 - Expert interviews on political agency

Study 2 answers the second research question; its broad aim is to explore agency in the communication process and the creation of political meaning, in order to develop hypotheses that can explain why Mélenchon and LFI engage with the politics of insecurity. More specifically, Study 2 seeks to hypothesise to what extent Mélenchon's and LFI's insecurity narratives belong to the realm of ideas and hence signal these actors' understanding of the political world in terms of relationships of insecurity; or whether these narratives are part of a more conscious strategy.

To fulfil these aims, the project turns to the interviewing method because, as Rathbun (2008, 686) puts it, interviews are “the best tool” to investigate agency and motivations in political decision-making. In the context of this research, I chose to interview *experts* with specialised knowledge about Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party. Hence, participants were chosen because of their unique perspectives on the case. Accessing experts' knowledge has two advantages. First, expert interviews allow

us to gain insights about ideology and strategy that are not filtered by party officials' own interests in what to disclose to researchers. This is a typical pitfall of 'elite' interviews with party officials, as this type of participants may withhold information from the researcher for a variety of reasons (Rathbun 2008). It is also the reason why expert interviews were preferred to elite interviews for exploratory research of this type. Second, experts' knowledge represents a crucial source of information against which we can unpack the thesis' communication findings and look for elements that signal ideological or strategic motivations within the party's discourse.

This part of the thesis is exploratory as not much is known on why the PRL engages with the politics of insecurity. For this reason, expert interviews are deemed the most suitable method, as one of their epistemological functions is precisely to gain knowledge and guide the development of hypotheses about a relatively unknown research problem (Döringer 2021; see also Bogner and Menz 2009). As shown in Chapter 6, these exploratory interviews added important contextual knowledge to the case study, and enabled me to discuss the relation between 'the left' (broadly speaking) and security in more detail. Crucially they allowed me to inductively generate informed hypotheses for future research on the topic (Von Soest 2022).

The method has been criticised because experts may display their own biases in relation to the research. To address this concern, I invited experts from both 'inside' and 'outside' the field. According to Von Soest (2022), inside experts are those who are directly involved in the process in question, hence they can be considered primary sources of information. Outside experts, on the other hand, are not directly involved and have rather gained their knowledge through research and observation. This balances the primary exposure offered by inside experts with the potential for a more reflective approach taken by outside experts. Hence selecting a combination of inside

and outside experts allows one to gain insights into information that may not be publicly available, while also maintaining a more objective and observational point of view.

4.8 Research procedure

In this section, I delve into how the research was conducted, starting from selecting and sampling the sources to developing the codebook for the Content Analysis Study. I then move on to Expert Interviews, providing details about the research participants, their recruitment and the discussion guide.

4.8.1. Sources

Following Holsti (1969), I started by first selecting the sources and then sampling the documents. The resources reported below are listed on LFI's website (<https://lafranceinsoumise.fr/medias/>) as the official media channels of the party and its leader. These are all platforms to communicate with the public, hence they give insights into what they wish to communicate to their electorate, sympathisers and potential voters.

1. YouTube
2. Facebook
3. Twitter
4. The leader's blog (L'Ere du Peuple)
5. The party's multimedia platform (L'insoumission)
6. The review of the Parti de Gauche (L'interet general)
7. The party's newspaper (L'Heure du Peuple, now rebranded as L'Insoumission Hebdo)

Since this study is interested in the official narratives put forward by the party and its leader, I excluded L'Interet General (nr. 6 in the list), because it is the newspaper of Mélenchon's former party, the Parti de Gauche. I also excluded L'Insoumission (nr. 5), because it is a new platform only launched in 2020 with not enough developed content.

The focus was therefore on a mix of different communication platforms and contents: the more traditional approach of written texts (blog and newspaper), the more condensed style of Twitter (which was selected over Facebook precisely for the limitation on characters that the platform has been historically known for) and finally the pedagogic approach of long, explanatory videos (YouTube). The final corpus included Mélenchon's blog posts, editorials from LFI's newspaper, Twitter posts from both party's and leader's accounts, and YouTube transcripts from 'The Review of the Week' videos. The 'free flow' of these media (as opposed to the party programme which is a more formal and structured form of communication) allows for unrestricted communication and hence enables us to capture wider meanings. Moreover, as discussed earlier, this variation in formats and message packaging provides an excellent opportunity to study both rich narrative accounts (written outlets), the micro-dynamics of framing (Twitter) and investigate mechanisms of interpretation (didactic YouTube videos).

The total of pieces retrieved, transcribed and catalogued from the following sources, starting from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2020, is displayed in Table 4.2. below.

Table 4.2: Sample retrieved

Sources	Total retrieved
L'Ere du People (Mélenchon's blog)	187 blog posts
L'Heure du People (LFI paper)	176 editorials
Twitter	Mélenchon: 13.552 tweets LFI: 12.365 tweets
YouTube	127 ' The Review of the Week' transcripts

For the comparative analysis with the PRR and the mainstream left, the project zoomed into the year 2020 because the pandemic that unfolded that year represents an event which generated a profound sense of insecurity in and of itself. This allows us to observe how parties made sense of it, most notably how the key pillars of their ideologies shaped the narratives they offered around COVID-19. The aim of this within-case comparison was to reconstruct the narratives that the PRR and mainstream left were adopting during that period. For this reason, I excluded Twitter as this would only give us access to the microdynamics of framing, to focus on more articulate texts. Since RN and PS do not rely on similar platforms that would enable the reconstruction of insecurity narratives (none of the two publishes a blog or a newspaper), I opted for press releases as these represented comparable materials. Press releases are considered an ideal tool for political communication analysis because they allow us to observe what issues parties choose to communicate and emphasise, for instance without the time constraints of media appearances, speeches or questions in the legislature (Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016). Moreover press releases are issued regularly, as opposed to party manifestos which are only published around elections and hence available only for certain points in time (ibid.). They are important for zooming into a particular time period, as is the aim of this section of the thesis,

because in these documents “parties try to launch their main theme du jour” (Norris et al. 1999, 44) hence presenting their position on current affairs. In total, N=430 press releases for RN and N=65 for PS were retrieved for the period 1 January-31 December 2020.

The following section details how all these documents (from Mélenchon, LFI, RN and PS) were further sampled in order to restrict the analysis to texts that contained insecurity-related keywords.

4.8.2. Sampling

As discussed in Chapter 3, the theoretical framework contains four categories: insecurity as threat, insecurity as uncertainty, insecurity as the need for protection and insecurity by association. This framework was first operationalised into a set of keywords (see Table 4.3 below), which were then used in a ‘Text Search Query’ on the Nvivo software. This was done across the total corpus of materials retrieved.

Table 4.3: Insecurity keywords

	Insecurity as threat	Insecurity as uncertainty	Insecurity as need for protection	Insecurity by association
Keywords	Danger Peril Risk Threat	Chaos Crisis Destabilisation Disorder Instability Precarity Uncertainty	Defend Preserve Protect Safeguard	Catastrophe Crime Destruction Disaster Violence War

In addition to these keywords, I also added the words ‘security, insecurity and safety’ to ensure no general references to security were missed. The results of the Text Search Query returned a set of texts that contained one or more of these keywords.

To establish whether these texts contained *valid* references to (in)security, I manually assessed them, because not all keywords are necessarily used as part of a security conceptual system. For example, *à vos risques et périls* (at your own risk), is a French expression that although containing two security keywords (‘risk’, and ‘peril’, according to the theoretical framework) certainly does not denote a security frame. Hence, to address this, the study was followed by a manual coding and qualitative analysis on the paragraphs containing security references, to discern whether a security frame was in place and with what content/features.

The remaining sample, consisting of the following texts, constituted the basis for the full research (N=456 for Mélenchon; N=450 for LFI; for the comparative 2020 deep dive: N=104 for RN; N=22 for PS). The table below offers a more detailed breakdown of the final sample for Mélenchon and LFI.

Table 4.4: Final sample

Source	Initially retrieved	Final sample
L'Ere du People (Mélenchon's blog)	187 blog posts	121 (65%)
L'Heure du People (LFI's paper)	176 editorials	77 (44%)
Twitter	Mélenchon: 13.552 tweets LFI: 12.365 tweets	265 (2%) 373 (3%)
YouTube	127 'The Review of the Week' transcripts	70 (55%)

4.8.3. Codebook

To assess the presence of insecurity frames and then reconstruct the content of insecurity narratives, I developed a theory-driven codebook that I applied to the purposive sample of texts containing insecurity references generated by the Text Search Query, as discussed in the previous section. After two pilot tests that allowed me to further refine the coding categories, the final codebook displayed three sections, designed to capture the following:

Section 1: insecurity frame

Section 2: insecurity type

Section 3: the relationship of insecurity

Section 1 captured how insecurity is presented in political discourse by coding for sentences or entire passages with explicit references to ideas of threat, uncertainty, need for protection or association with other insecurity themes (as per the keywords presented in the Table 4.3). I read the whole text thoroughly and I assessed if the word-mention was valid, by checking if an ‘X = insecurity’ structure could be identified.

That is

- X is a threat
- X generates disorder
- Y should be protected from X
- X is a catastrophe, or X is criminal, or X generates violence, etc.

When any of these associations could be identified, I coded the full sentence or passage in which the frame was contained. For example, the sentence ‘climate change threatens humanity’ would be assigned the code ‘insecurity as threat’.

Once the frames were established, I proceeded with **Section 2** of the codebook which coded for the type of insecurity at stake. This was done by categorising whether insecurity affected the economic, environmental, military, political and societal security domains (Buzan et al. 1998). Following established IR theories, these domains were operationalised based on the affected referent object (ibid.) For example, a threat whose referent object was the job market would fall in the economic insecurity sector.

Section 3 zoomed into the narrative's syntax form with two codes that answered the following questions: 1) Who/what constitutes a danger? 2) Who/what is affected by that?. These two questions helped assign the codes of, respectively, *Source of insecurity* and *Affected by insecurity*. Returning to our previous example 'climate change threatens humanity': climate change would be assigned the code Source of insecurity and humanity would be tagged as Affected by insecurity. By doing so, I was able to capture what actors/topics were pitted against each other and presented as in a relationship of insecurity.

The codebook was piloted twice on different written materials from La France Insoumise, including the manifesto, as well as the 2016 editorials of the party's newspaper. The pilot was crucial to develop two key rules for coding ambiguous or vague references. Rule 1 established that frames must have a referent subject 'X' (e.g., X is dangerous, X generates violence). This was necessary to distinguish between insecurity framing (e.g., 'the COVID-crisis is a crisis of capitalism') and themes ('the COVID-crisis'). In this example, only the first is coded as a framing attempt ('the COVID-crisis is a crisis of capitalism'), because the project studies how framing takes place and in relation to what issues (the Xs). Although the second example (a simple reference to 'the COVID-crisis' as a noun) would equally be returned by the automatic Text Search by the software, it was not included in the

coding because it represented a theme of its own that could be articulated in a variety of ways and not necessarily in terms of insecurity. I therefore let themes (the Xs) *emerge* through frames. Rule 2 established that an insecurity frame can exist without a referent object Y and that this constituted a case of diffuse insecurity-framing, in which an X is presented as a source of insecurity but in a dispersed way, without a clear Y affected by it. A clear example of this are statements such as ‘climate change is a threat’, that do not specify a threat ‘to whom’.

The codebook was applied to both the full research on Mélenchon and LFI, and the 2020 deep-dive which compared them with the radical right (RN) and the mainstream left (PS). I returned to the data at several points in time to ensure coding consistency and a high intracoder reliability. The percentage of agreement ranged between 97 and 98%.

4.8.4. Expert Interviews

The expert interviews focused on discussing the party’s communication and its approach to security with academics with specialised knowledge of French politics, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and LFI. The table below reports the name and institutional affiliations of the participants (in alphabetical order), alongside the date of the interview. All interviews took place online via Zoom.

Table 4.5: Experts taking part in Study 2

Name	University Affiliation	Interview date
Chloé Alexandre	Science Po Grenoble (France)	July 20 th , 2022
Martin Baloge	Catholic University of Lille (France)	July 7 th , 2022
Marion Beauvalet	University of Paris-Dauphine (France)	August 5 th , 2022
Laura Chazel	Science Po Grenoble (France)	June 28 th 2022

Paolo Chiocchetti	European University Institute (Italy)	August 3 rd , 2022
Manuel Cervera-Marzal	University of Liège (Belgium)	July 4 th , 2022
Vincent Dain	University of Rennes (France)	July 21 st , 2022
Nicolas Hubé	University of Lorraine (France)	July 5 th , 2022

These academics were invited to take part in the study as experts because they met at least one of the criteria below:

- A. Have published peer-reviewed work on the party and its leader
- B. Have interviewed LFI party officials in the past
- C. Have worked closely with party activists

One of the experts is also an active member of the party and is the author of the programmatic booklet on security that LFI presented at the 2022 elections.

Following ethical approval from the University of Birmingham, participants were recruited via email and provided with an information sheet and a consent form. The study was described as a research project “on how left populist parties engage with the communication of insecurity, focusing on a case study on Mélenchon and La France Insoumise”. Experts’ knowledge was described as needed “to generate insights to contextualise the research findings and better understand how the party behaves and communicates”. Participants were invited to Zoom interviews which were conducted in the period June 28th - August 5th 2022; interviews were recorded, subsequently transcribed and then analysed via Nvivo. They were initially piloted in early June 2022 with one PhD student and two postdocs working on French populism and the party more specifically.

The interview guide was developed around semi-structured questions, which are considered the most useful format for research with this audience (Tansey 2007), and

which better equips us to capture agreement among experts. The interview guide was structured as follows:

- I first opened the conversation by asking respondents what they thought about *Mélenchon's declarations over the years about how his political thought has changed*. This open question was intended to gauge the experts' views on Mélenchon's populism.
- The second question focused on the party communication strategy and I asked more specifically what were the *topics and themes that the respondent associated with the party*. This was to understand whether the themes the party is perceived to own were in line with those emerging from my communication analysis.
- I also asked for the experts' view on *who drives the communication* within the party, before moving on to the topic of *security* and asking to what extent experts thought this '*theme*' was *something LFI and Mélenchon talk about*. During this part of the conversation, I also probed respondents on the *meaning of 'security'* and on *different forms of insecurity*.
- The fifth question focused on a brief quote from Mélenchon on the *left being uncomfortable with security*. I asked experts what this may mean and to whom it could have been directed, to understand their impressions on the relationship between Mélenchon, insecurity and the French left more generally.
- The last part of the interview centred on the role of ideas and strategies. I first asked respondents what they thought the *party and its leader wanted to achieve when integrating discussions on insecurity in their communication*. I also asked

them *what, if anything, drove Mélenchon's and LFI's vision on insecurity*, from an ideational point for view.

Interviews lasted on average 45 to 60 minutes and produced a rich set of data that I analysed via Nvivo. I first produced the following broad codes (presented below in alphabetical order) to capture the key ideas of interview questions:

1. Audience
2. Driving the communication strategy
3. Expert's view on populism
4. Language of security
5. Left and security
6. Main themes and topics
7. Mélenchon's populism
8. Strategy
9. Vision of security
10. What is security

As part of the analysis, I closely re-read the interviews, and created additional codes inductively to capture the different strategies that experts were discussing when linking the discussion of insecurity to the party's key goals. These codes were:

1. Agenda setting
2. Competing with Le Pen
3. Competing with the left
4. Criticising elites
5. Mobilising voters/activists
6. Politicising
7. Profile building
8. Resignifying security

Three of these codes were later merged into the code ‘Conflictualising, politicising and setting the agenda’ (see Chapter 6: Expert Interviews Study, for an extended discussion) resulting in five final codes.

The findings of both Study 1 and 2 will be presented and examined in depth in the following two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6). Before concluding the present discussion, the next sections provide some epistemological reflections and then a summary of the key takeaway from this chapter.

4.9. Epistemological Reflections

In this section I scrutinise my epistemological assumptions, engaging in a process of self-reflection to identify and address potential biases. The core of this discussion is my understanding of insecurity, as the way I conceptualise it has a significant impact on the findings this research produces.

In arguing that, in order to identify security and insecurity in contemporary societies, we need to look at political discourse, this project starts from the assumption that language defines and shapes our understanding of the social world. This means that the thesis does not look at *what* constitutes insecurity but at *how* it becomes known to the public.

In philosophical terms, this entails a constructivist epistemology that acknowledges the crucial role of human interpretation in defining threats and underlines that those threats “do not ‘exist’ in any objective and measurable sense beyond the speech-acts that create them” (Lott 2018). Regardless of whether we consider the social world to exist outside of human interpretation, the thesis’ starting

assumption is that it is nonetheless unintelligible without using language. As Lott (2018) puts it,

Constructivism does not deny the existence of a phenomenal world, external to thought. This is the world of brute (mainly natural) facts. It does oppose, and this is something different, that phenomena can constitute themselves as objects of knowledge independently of discursive practices. It does not challenge the possible thought-independent existence of (in particular natural) phenomena, but it challenges their language-independent observation.

In the study of security, taking up this approach means that we do not take insecurity as existing out there “without the requirement of actor interpretation” (ibid.). Furthermore, constructivists emphasise the role of ideas, culture and identities, arguing that this guides the identification of insecurity rather than material factors:

Rather than locating threats in the material collection of weapons, bank accounts, terrorist networks, etc., political constructivists argue that insecurity is a result of cultural practices that create enemies. In a very real way, states (or perhaps better, social groups) create their own insecurity. (Lott 2018)

In other words, the main ontological premise is that security “is not objective or neutral, but predicated on normative choices with inherent political implications” (Browning & McDonald, 2011, p. 238).

One of the perils that critics highlight about this way of investigating the social world is that we might end up making claims that are entirely relativistic, such as that anything surrounding us is potentially an issue of ‘security’. Hence there is a concern among more mainstream IR approaches that constructivists empty the concept of security of any analytical value. The so-called IR ‘realists’ - the scholars who argue that ‘objective conditions’ exist to identify security - are inspired by a positivist epistemology and hence investigate security as expressed by material factors and considerations which are empirically detectable. As constructivists have argued, a

constructivist understanding of security does not produce 'security relativism' because the construction of issues as 'security issues' is still dependent on accepting-audiences (Buzan et al. 1998; Lott 2018). In other words, taking a constructivist approach to security does not imply accepting that 'everything' can be made a security issue; rather, it refers to analytical attention devoted to the discursive practice that may start the process of recognising something as a threat but that may also fail in persuading an audience.

From a normative standpoint, taking a constructivist approach to security emphasises the necessity to also take up a reflective approach to security practices that allows analysts and policymakers to critique, construct and reconstruct the way insecurity is understood.

4.10. Summary

This chapter has outlined the selection criteria that have pinned down the case of political leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the party LFI as the selected case to study the politics of insecurity as performed by radical left populists. It has shown how the 'politics of insecurity' model, which abstracts the phenomenon through insecurity frames and a relationship of insecurity, was applied to the selected case via a content analysis of key media platforms. Finally, it discussed the role of expert interviews in answering the exploratory research question and developing informed hypotheses that can be tested in future research.

Chapter 5: The Content Analysis Study

5.1. Introduction

The ‘politics of insecurity’ model presented in previous chapters examines the communication of insecurity using four main frames: insecurity as *threat*, *uncertainty*, *need for protection* and *by association*. It also captures the content of these frames by examining what are the main characters of the story, which is built as a *relationship of insecurity*.

The present chapter reviews the findings of the Content Analysis Study to answer the first research question: How do political parties and leaders espousing radical left populism interpret and communicate (i.e., *frame*) (in)security in their external communication? Are their (in)security narratives predominantly shaped by populist ideas or their radical left ideology?

The chapter discusses how Mélenchon and La France Insoumise (LFI) package insecurity messages: what frames are used, what are the sources and the recipients of insecurity, what type of insecurity is prioritised. Based on these insights, the chapter analyses Mélenchon’s and LFI’s general vision of contemporary insecurity by reconstructing their security imaginary. It delivers a fine-grained analysis of how Mélenchon and LFI communicate insecurity that details in what ways they perform the politics of insecurity and how this is shaped by their ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ ideologies. The qualitative evidence shows that Mélenchon and LFI perform a politics of insecurity which relies on three key narratives: the first mobilises ‘everyday insecurity’ to construct a state of precariousness for the people and their identity as an ‘insecure people’; the second connects these insecurities in a ‘bundle of crises’ to underscore the complexity of the contemporary (in)security environment; the third traces insecurity

and its aggravation to the ‘failure of elites’. Taken together, these narratives build a story of contemporary insecurity as shared by the people and produced by the elites in power. In other words, insecurity comes to demarcate the people from the elites.

Building on the empirical findings (see next sections and Chapter 7: Conclusions), the chapter argues that Mélenchon and LFI perform a politics of insecurity that is intrinsically populist because the ‘relationship of insecurity’ that is discursively established (i.e., the danger versus the endangered) is clearly centred on the struggle people vs. the elites. Their insecurity narratives, however, are also shaped by additional thick ideological elements, most notably their critique of contemporary neoliberalism.

The chapter is structured into eight main sections. The second section starts off the discussion by reflecting on what is added to the narration by the specificities of the platform being used - from blog posts and editorials to Twitter and YouTube. The third section focuses on the narrative *structure* by examining each narrative component (e.g., insecurity frames, insecurity sources, etc) separately. After this conceptual and analytical overview, the chapter moves to the fourth section on narrative *content*, which delves into the qualitative analysis of how the single components come together as part of a *story*. The fifth and sixth sections discuss, respectively, Mélenchon’s and LFI’s security imaginary and the main logics and functions of their insecurity narratives, offering thoughts on the counternarratives and policy proposals they support. Before concluding, the seventh section compares the PRL against the narratives of the populist right and mainstream left in France.

5.2. The role of the different media platforms

The analysis presented in this thesis centres on content originating from different platforms, most notably Twitter, YouTube, blogs and editorials. This section reflects on the role played by these various media channels in the construction of insecurity narratives.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the party and its leader use blog posts and editorials to communicate at length about key topics, dissecting relevant events in the news, providing their own take and detailing their interpretation. The blog, in particular, has been used by Mélenchon to ‘popularise’ his own intellectual and conceptual work by linking the notions and arguments developed in his books to the discussion of everyday issues (Therond 2020). In addition, the party’s weekly rubric *La Revue de la Semaine* (RDLs, The Review of the Week), which is disseminated via Mélenchon’s YouTube channel, takes up a didactic approach to explaining political affairs. Combined with the more synthetic style used on Twitter, these outlets allow us to gain insights into both detailed and articulated interpretations of contemporary events and carefully crafted compact messages, hence enabling both a rich reconstruction of insecurity narratives and their micro dynamics.

Table 5.1: Insecurity-relevant texts (in percentage)

Initially retrieved	Texts contained (in)security references
187 blog posts (Mélenchon)	121 (65%)
176 editorials (LFI)	77 (44%)
Mélenchon: 13.552 tweets LFI: 12.365 tweets	265 (2%) 373 (3%)

127 'The Review of the Week' transcripts (Mélenchon)	70 (55%)
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The analysis shows that the narratives are skilfully adapted to the affordances of each medium. As **Twitter** is a character-limited social media, we notice that insecurity narratives on this platform provide basic hints at the relationship of insecurity between key actors. To put it differently, it seems that given the platform's compact format, the relationship of insecurity appears in its most basic form, with only 'dangers' and 'victims' being the characters of the story spelt out most often. The narratives are also duly adjusted to the platform, with the sources and affected by insecurity often appearing in the form of hashtags (e.g., #Macron). Hence the micro-communication dynamics at play on Twitter allow us to capture, in a very synthetic way, basic relationships of insecurity. Nevertheless, Twitter is the media with the lowest incidence of insecurity narratives, as only 2-3% of the tweets initially retrieved for Mélenchon and LFI contain insecurity frames (see Table 5.1 above). This may be due to the amount of posting which takes place on the platform and which makes the Twitter sample the largest among the platforms examined here (over 25.000 tweets). This is because, in comparison to the other media that Mélenchon and LFI use, Twitter is a *social* media, and the party and its leader offer a greater variety of content to engage users and stay relevant. **Blogs and editorials**, on the other hand, seem to serve a different function. Given the obvious difference in the length of these pieces compared to a tweet, insecurity narratives appearing on these media provide a more detailed story of insecurity. For example, it is thanks to the fine-grained articulation of the issues at hand presented in these platforms that we were able to reconstruct the party's understanding of contemporary insecurity, that is, what is insecurity / who is affected by it / and because of whom (see later sections). Thanks to blogs and editorials, we

also learnt how Mélenchon and LFI use insecurity is a mobilisational way, as they link insecurity back to broader societal issues and to the resolutions contained in their political programme. It is important to note that blogs and editorials are directed at sympathisers and supporters of the party, and hence at generally politically engaged individuals. This provides Mélenchon and LFI with an audience who they know 'is listening', hence they can invest in articulating their political vision and interpretation of current affairs in a more detailed way. The relevance of insecurity in this sample was between 40 and 65% overall.

If tweets suggest where the relationship of insecurity lies and blogs and editorials enrich the story, the **YouTube** series 'La Revue de la Semaine' (RDLS) can be imagined as a tool to put everything into perspective for the audience. As Mélenchon has repeatedly suggested in these weekly videos, the mission of RDLS is to 'show' how 'things line up' and to emphasise the need for the public's comprehension of complex matters, as the quotes below exemplify:

It is my duty to remind you of this and try to put it into perspective. To show that, in total, it makes for a very unstable world (RDLS n.34, 7 July 2017).

I wanted to tell you all this because I would be surprised if this is the last time we talk about it in this Review of the Week. Little by little, you must all get used to the idea that human civilization is endangered by climate change. (RDLS n.18, 8 September 2017).

This may explain why the relevance of insecurity on this platform goes well over 50% of texts.

The second particularity of RDLS is its clearly **didactic approach**. Mélenchon engages with each topic as a teacher, providing definitions of key terms, a brief history to contextualise the issues, and spelling out the meaning of acronyms such as NATO or the UN. Moreover, Mélenchon explains issues using various basic examples and everyday talk. For instance, when (counter)arguing that Russia is not the enemy, he

explains to his viewers that this “does not mean that Putin is your best friend and you’re going to go camping together this summer” (RDLS n.14, 13 January 2017). This conversational tone is systematically adopted to narrate complex issues, with Mélenchon often summarising the decision-making of key actors in the form of dialogues and engaging in what appears to the viewer as storytelling. The example below shows how Mélenchon explained the birth of the World Trade Organisation in this fashion:

Then it became more and more difficult and the powerful tried a coup de force, that is, they said: "Since it is like that, we will hold more private meetings, we are going to make a big organization, it will be called the World Trade Organization and it is there that we will negotiate the constitution of a large world market which will bring together all those who subscribe to certain standards" (RDLS n.18, 17 February 2017)

In Mélenchon’s own words, RDLS is “a place where you learn useful stuff” (RDLS n. 43, 19 October 2017). This approach is likely due to the platform being used to reach a young audience, which is also evidenced by Mélenchon often explicitly referring to his viewers as ‘you, young people’. This means that complex insecurity themes are ‘debunked’ and explained in an erudite but understandable way, with the hope that listeners will follow the same line of interpretation as Mélenchon. The following example refers to the clashes between the US security agencies and Donald Trump in the early stages of his presidency, and its destabilising impact on European security. It shows how Mélenchon communicates his interpretation of insecurity to audiences, prompting them to follow his take and spread it further:

We are living in a dangerous moment, and I wanted to give those who are listening some keys to understand this situation so that you see, that you measure the risk that is accruing, [so that you see] that there is something in Europe that is degenerating and that leads us to something that we do not want. Me, I have done my job: I analysed, I talked, I explained. It's far from the Disneyland you're usually served. Now that you have these [interpretative] keys, maybe you will analyse [the situation] a bit like I did,

you will follow [the situation] while being vigilant, cautious, and explaining to those around you what is happening. (RDSL n.14, 13 January 2017)

Overall Mélenchon uses the setting of his Weekly Review to explicitly call upon his viewers to follow his interpretations of events, by following the argument that “you can only draw the conclusion that” or “you see now how all these things come together” (e.g., RDSL n. 62, 19 May 2018).

This reflection helps set the stage for exploring the research findings, as it contextualises the relevance of these platforms for the wider engagement with the politics of insecurity.

5.3. Narrative structure

This section provides an overview of the research findings by describing the key components of the relationships of insecurity found in Mélenchon’s and LFI’s communication. The goal is to provide the reader with the main ‘pieces of the puzzle’ which are going to be put together in section 5.4 on narrative *content*, to delineate Mélenchon’s and LFI’s overall insecurity *story*. In the following subsections, we unpack the ‘pieces’ of this story: what insecurity frames are used, who is portrayed as a source of insecurity and who is identified as being affected by it, and finally what insecurity types are mostly frequently mentioned.

5.3.1. Insecurity framing

At the core of the communication of insecurity, I have argued, there is a process of framing. Rather than as a specific *theme* (e.g., crime, unsafety), in our complex

societies and communication environments, insecurity is best captured as a frame for interpretation. This implies that insecurity is not associated a priori with specific issues that would possess an insecurity ‘quality’; on the contrary, themes retain their quality as relating to economic, societal or political phenomena, but they can *also* be interpreted as insecurity issues if particular frames are in place. Based on my theoretical framework, this happens when they are posited as 1) threats, 2) as generating uncertainty and crisis, 3) when it is highlighted that something or somebody needs protection from them, or 4) when they are linked to an insecurity imaginary, that is, to ideas such as crime and war that are commonly understood as being ‘about security’. I have labelled these frames, respectively as 1) insecurity as threat, 2) insecurity as uncertainty, 3) insecurity as the need for protection and 4) insecurity by association.

While all the four insecurity frames have been detected in the corpus, it is the language of ‘threat’ and ‘insecurity by association’ that dominate the framing process, as shown in the Tables 5.2 and 5.3 below.

Table 5.2: Total frequency of insecurity frames in Mélenchon’s communication (blog L’Ere du Peuple, Twitter and YouTube ‘Review of the Week’, N=456)

<i>Security as/by</i>	Mélenchon			
	2017	2018	2019	2020
Threat	49	34	22	43
Uncertainty	12	14	12	20
Protection	20	9	11	15
Association	55	36	40	32

Table 5.3: Total frequency of insecurity frames in LFI's communication (editorials from L'Heure du Peuple and Twitter, N=450)

<i>Security as/by</i>	La France Insoumise			
	2017	2018	2019	2020
Threat	28	50	40	18
Uncertainty	11	16	8	8
Protection	12	22	20	8
Association	24	31	47	22

In communicating this way, the party and its leader embed insecurity in the texts in two ways, explored below.

With the first frame (insecurity as threat), Mélenchon's and LFI link the topic(s) under discussion to ideas of peril, positing certain characters as dangers and others as endangered. Actors and issues are linked to ideas of insecurity with *nouns* (i.e., X poses a danger), *adjectives* (i.e., X is dangerous) and *verbs* (i.e., X threatens). Table 5.4 (see below) presents some quotes to exemplify the frame in place.

Table 5.4: Examples of ‘Insecurity as Threat’ Frames in LFI’s and Mélenchon’s communication (emphasis added)

Democracy is seriously put in danger by the official ‘mediasphere’ (Mélenchon; Blog, 28 May 2017)
That 90% of media are owned by 9 billionaires is a sick and dangerous situation (Mélenchon; Blog, 4 September 2017)
CETA is dangerous [...] Free trade is a threat to the environment (LFI; Twitter, 30 November 2017)
Watch out! There is an atmosphere, an anti-parliamentary climate that is always dangerous for democracy (Mélenchon; YouTube, 7 February 2018)
No, it’s not China and Russia that are a danger to the world order. That’s the USA that are a danger to the world order! (Mélenchon; YouTube, 7 February 2018)
This [NATO] alliance at the service of the USA has become dangerous (LFI; Twitter, 4 April 2019)
The ecological catastrophe threatens the only ecosystem compatible with human life (LFI; Editorial, 8 July 2019)
The strength of reactionaries and conservatives is fraught with threats (LFI; Editorial, 17 February 2020)
#Macron is a threat to freedom (Mélenchon; Twitter, 21 July 2020)
The government’s austerity obsessions threaten our security (Mélenchon; Blog, 7 December 2020)

These examples show, in a condensed way, how ideas of threats are attached to a number of referent objects in different syntactic ways. This type of language lays the ground for identifying what ‘Xs’ are conceived as sources of insecurity in Mélenchon’s and LFI’s communication (which will be discussed more in detail in Section 5.3.2. on *Insecurity Sources*).

With the second frame (insecurity by association), LFI and Mélenchon link the topics under discussion to widely accepted insecurity-evoking themes in a ‘spillover of insecurity’. The centrality of these frames presents the reader with the option to start

thinking in terms of these connections, instilling a specific, insecurity-grounded *logic of interpretation* into the narrative. The keywords that are most characteristic of the insecurity-by-association frames, based on their communication, are crime, war, violence, catastrophe and destruction. Hence the frame works by linking certain topics with three key (in)security domains: national security (i.e., crime, violence), international security (i.e., war) and natural disasters (i.e., catastrophe and destruction). These references spill insecurity to additional, new topics because they suggest an interpretation centred on insecurity.

Table 5.5: Examples of ‘Insecurity by Association’ Frames in LFI’s and Mélenchon’s communication (emphasis added)

In this war which has been declared to us and waged relentlessly, journalism is only a pretext to better lead the charge (Mélenchon; Blog, 4 September 2017)
Macronian politics is climaticide (LFI; Editorial, 6 November 2017)
With the searches of LFI militants’ homes, the political sphere has been drawn into a legal hurricane which is devastating the coasts of democracy (Mélenchon; Blog, 27 November 2018)
These lobbies do violence to European citizens (LFI; Twitter, 25 August 2018)
One thing is sure, this majority spurred on by the EUropean Commission and the Central Bank is at social war with the people (Editorial, 27 August 2018)
1, 2, 3 degrees: it’s a crime against humanity (LFI; Twitter, 15 March 2019)
The text of the pension reform is a [form of] violence against democracy (Mélenchon; Twitter, 30 January 2020)
Austerity is criminal (LFI; Editorial, 30 March 2020)
We are at war, the social war (LFI; Editorial, 19 October 2020)
The social tsunami and industrial devastation are spreading (LFI; Editorial, 6 December 2020)

The examples from Table 5.5 (above) point out that when political actors label certain topics as ‘crimes’ or ‘criminal’ behaviour, they suggest an interpretative cue that aligns those issues with unlawful, damaging and harmful behaviour, that produces the unsafety typical of crime. The frame thus uses the insecurity of crime to sanction the societal unacceptability of particular acts, issues or kinds of behaviours. Similarly, defining the struggle between the people and the elites as a war implies the enmity, danger and threat to survival historically associated with military confrontation. This frame mobilises French and European recent history, often referring explicitly to the devastation of the world wars as a warning, positing the party and its candidate as the tool to lead the people successfully out of the war condition. Finally, epitomising events as catastrophes projects the idea of destruction and devastation typical of natural disasters, which by definition produce devastating consequences on the affected areas and populations. As some quotes from Table 5.5 show, the French socio-economic landscape is often portrayed in relation to ‘legal hurricanes’ devastating the ‘coasts of democracy’, to ‘social tsunami and industrial devastation’, with Mélenchon similarly labelling authoritarianism and racism a ‘destructive wind whirl’ (Blog, 31 August 2019).

Overall the use of these frames tells us that Mélenchon and LFI clearly see an aura of insecurity production in certain actors and issues, which is expressed through a language of threat and metaphorical associations to traditionally insecurity-evoking themes. As we will see in the following sections, this insecurity constitutes a central component of the way Mélenchon and LFI construct the people/elite relationship as one between a victim and a perpetrator.

At the **national level**, the entire political 'caste' is considered a source of insecurity. Besides president Macron, the producers of insecurity are his government and specific ministers, mainstream parties across the spectrum and the 'extreme right' (*extreme droit*, the appellation for Le Pen's Rassemblement National). Insecurity sources also include the media, the police and the judicial system, all considered an extension of the government's anti-democratic agenda to 'dominate' over the people. At the **supranational level**, the EU - intended either as a whole or as specific institutions (e.g., the Commission) - is a frequent subject of insecurity narratives, and it is usually addressed with epitomes that underscore its undemocratic character, for example, linked to ideas of tyranny, sovereignty deprivation, or the ironic 'the Europe that protects us'. The EU-danger often appears in conjunction with Germany (*Allemagne*), and the two sources of insecurity are often conflated together under the expression 'German Europe'; this common theme is used as a shortcut to delegitimise EU institutions as mere tools for reinstating Germany's dominance across the continent. Finally, the party's anti-elitism guides the identification of insecurity sources also at the **international level**, where the US and NATO (*OTAN*) feature prominently as the embodiment of 'globalist', self-interested and harmful elites.

Figure 5.2: Insecurity sources in LFI materials 2017-2020 (word frequency)



Besides the elites, some ‘non-personified’ sources of insecurity emerge as well. Among the most frequent are nuclear power (*nucléaire*, considered a multifaceted threat to the environment, to citizens’ safety and the international balance of power), pesticides (*pesticides* or more specifically *glyphosate*, predominantly narrated in relation to physical threats), austerity and capitalism (*austérité* and *capitalisme*, as broad societal dangers that affect the state and its capacity to protect citizens).

Interestingly, even when non-personified threats appear, these are still linked to elites who become the indirect producers of insecurity. In other words, even when not identified as direct sources of insecurity, these actors are linked to insecurity through practices of blame attribution. The COVID-19 pandemic is a useful example in this regard. Although the coronavirus gained particular relevance in Mélenchon’s and LFI’s communication in 2020, the insecurity it generated was clearly linked to the misbehaviour of elites:

Today's health crisis is the result of successive restrictions voted by the UMP [*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*, mainstream right], the PS [*Parti Socialiste*, mainstream left] and LREM [*La République en Marche*, Macron's party] in the budgets of social security and public hospitals. (LFI; Editorial 30 March 2020)

In reality the guilt goes much deeper. The European Union has worked *methodically* to dismantle states and their public health systems. If there is a lack of beds, respirators, personnel in Italian, Spanish or French hospitals, it is its fault. Because it is the Commission that demands cuts in public spending from these states every year. Between 2011 and 2018, it did it 63 times! It is therefore no coincidence that Europe is today the global epicentre of the epidemic and the place where [the epidemic] causes the most deaths. (Mélenchon; Blog, 7 April 2020; emphasis added)

Here LFI and Mélenchon offer interesting counter-narratives designating the pandemic not as the result of a health emergency but as generated by the threats that capitalism poses to public services, vulnerable groups and the relationship with nature. However, these examples point to the presence of an important layer in the dangerousness of elites: their neoliberal ideology. The EU, for example, is narrated in relation to insecurity because of its 'free-trade obsessions' and 'criminal' austerity policies while the threats stemming from Macron's presidency often have to do with his implementation of neoliberal precepts.

Overall, responsibility for insecurity still tends to be attributed to *actors* more than *factors*, leading to what we may consider a *personification of insecurity* first and foremost in the figure of president Macron and then the set of EU institutions. The presentation of elites as either direct or indirect sources of insecurity indicates that the idea of 'damaging elites' may be used as a tool to personify and hence contextualise the insecurities induced by more complex challenges posed by neoliberalism, as well as issues with representativeness and responsiveness in contemporary democracies.

In the next section, I discuss which category, according to Mélenchon and LFI, emerges as the recipient of this insecurity.

5.3.3. *Affected by Insecurity*

Similarly to the identification of *Sources*, I zoomed into the narrative's syntax to understand who or what was made vulnerable by the sources of insecurity according to Mélenchon and LFI.

Although references to traditionally left-wing appeals appear, they are only salient for the party, which identifies the recipients of insecurity to be 'rights' (*droits*) and 'public services' (*le service public*) (see Figure 5.4 below). For Mélenchon, the most frequently denoted as affected by insecurity are referent objects of clear collective denotation, such as 'us' (*nous*), 'democracy' (*démocratie*), 'society' (*société*) and 'humans' (*humains*) (see Figure 5.3 below). This generally reflects the evolution in Mélenchon's thought, at the core of several of his books, where he argued how his renewed understanding of the political struggle no longer goes through the workers but through a broader and more identifiable category, the people (see also Hamburger 2018).

Figure 5.3: Affected by Insecurity for Mélenchon 2017-2020 (word frequency)



The collective appeals at the core of insecurity narratives in Figure 5.3 denote the people both as a nation and as demos, overall as an organic community living in the French territory. These appeals are not grounded in nativist ideals but on ‘Republican values’, such as secularism and liberty, which are considered key markers of French identity and pride. Although not in a xenophobic way, these narratives still clearly demarcate between an inside and an outside: the *inside* is the place of our ‘society’, ‘country’ and ‘democracy’ but most importantly, it is the place of those who share the Republican values; the outside, in contrast, is not only the space of the ‘external’ and harmful globalised world, with its foreign wars and international disorder, but it is also the space for those who, although in the inside, do not adhere to the foundational values of Republican France.

Figure 5.4: Affected by Insecurity in LFI materials 2017-2020 (word frequency)



Generally, the idea of demarcation is particularly explicit in Mélenchon's writing both in terms of division over values and physical division through borders. On several occasions he has reiterated his opposition to the EU 'open borders' and the 'right of free settlement' for immigrants, advocating instead for 'treating the causes of departure' directly in African countries (on this, see also: Section 5.6.2 on *Counternarratives*). Mélenchon thus approaches the migration issue by drawing a demarcating line between inside and outside the nation, placing immigrants in the latter space.

Overall insecurity is used as an ideational resource that constructs the identity of the people as an ‘insecure people’ against the producers of insecurity, which are the elites. As the following example shows, Mélenchon rallies his supporters along lines dictated by insecurity, separating the ‘affected’ from the ‘perpetrators’:

Those who want the defence of economic democracy, against the big fraudsters and the 1% who controls more wealth than the rest of the planet; of political democracy, against those who raise the flags of hatred and xenophobia; of feminist democracy, against a system which discriminates every day and in all areas of life against half of the population; of ecological democracy, against an unsustainable economic system that threatens the very continuity of life on the planet; of international democracy and peace, against those who want to once again build a Europe of war; those who share the defence of human rights and the elementary principles of good living will find their home in this movement. (Blog, 14 April 2018)

Insecurity rather than class clearly appears as the defining mechanism to bring together a multitude of civic subjects, based on their precarious present rather than social status. Insecurity thus functions as a tool to create a homogenous people, and mitigates the plurality of social demands by channelling them through the sharedness of the insecurity experience. Hence, Mélenchon's discourse seems more directed at securing an identity rather than material resources and political values, as opposed to the party's narrative which centred on rights and services.

5.3.4. Insecurity types

As discussed in the methods chapter, the 'type' of insecurity ascertains what is the security domain under discussion and this was broadly categorised as economic, environmental, military, political, and societal based on the broad referent object of security. For example, threats to the job market would fall under the domain of economic insecurity whereas those against public goods would be categorised as societal insecurity.

The coding of LFI's and Mélenchon's communication reveal a number of topics as the object of insecurity frames; although all the above domain categorisations

appear throughout the four-year time frame, the domain of societal insecurity is the most dominant for both the party and its leader, as shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Total frequencies of insecurity types (blog *L'Ere du Peuple*, editorials from *L'Heure du Peuple*, Tweets, and Reviews of the Week)

Insecurity type	Mélenchon				LFI			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020
Economic	45	18	12	21	11	20	25	14
Environmental	27	16	22	14	9	24	34	12
Societal	70	44	27	58	39	75	55	37
Political	29	34	29	33	21	22	23	13
Military	21	13	5	1	1	12	9	2

The most common narrative in the communication of both Mélenchon and LFI is a narrative of *societal* insecurity. This narrative spotlights a variety of threats for public health (such the use of dangerous pesticides and more recently the Covid-19 crisis) or public services (such as threats to the education and housing systems); the narrative also raises concerns about food insecurity in France, and about an increasingly deteriorating environment for social rights and fundamental liberties. These are all key examples of Mélenchon's and LFI's concern with societal security during the time period under consideration.

There are however forms of insecurity that appear more salient for the leader than the party. Mélenchon seems particularly concerned about issues relating to different aspects of sovereignty, from political to industrial and agricultural 'sovereignty', and on the impact that this 'inability' to control has on democratic quality and economic performance, as well as the functioning of public services. This is why

political insecurity is consistently the second highest form of insecurity mobilised in his communication. Moreover, since 2018 Mélenchon has been particularly vocal about threats to political freedom and political opposition in France. This is linked to his investigation for irregularities in the management of public funds, which he denounced as a ‘witch-hunt’ and as a government attempt to silence an opposition party (Agence Press 2018). Hence this also contributes to explaining the relevance of political insecurity in his texts.

Although political insecurity displays a certain salience in the party communication as well, overall LFI seems to devote more attention to environmental issues, with environmental insecurity often scoring as the second highest in salience. Contrary to expectations about the relevance of economic insecurity for a radical left actor, this insecurity category is not the prime concern for the party or its leader. This suggests that although they may both place particular emphasis on issues such as the fight against unemployment and economic precarity, the insecurity lenses to these topics are not always or necessarily applied, which explains the lower relevance of this category. This may also suggest the lack of a strong radical left focus in the insecurity narrative put forward by LFI and Mélenchon; however, as the earlier section has shown, the neoliberalism critique, typical of radical left parties, is still central to LFI’s communication, and displays its main incidence in the identification of insecurity *sources*. In other words, instead of being identified as sources of insecurity of their own right, neoliberal policies and neoliberal ideology are used as tools to explain *why* elites producers insecurity.

5.4. Narrative content

The concepts we have examined so far (i.e., frames and insecurity types, the sources and those affected by insecurity) offer an understanding of Mélenchon's and LFI's construction of insecurity narratives as a combination of *elements*. In this section, I explore via a qualitative analysis how these elements *come together* in the form of a *story* that Mélenchon and LFI use to offer their interpretations of contemporary security. In what follows, I present three key narratives: everyday insecurity and omnipresent enemies; the insecurity bundle; elites' failures and the aggravation of insecurity. After examining the key story at the core of each narrative, I then show how these narratives - taken together and in argumentative relation with one another - offer a view into the 'security imaginary' of the PRL (Section 5.5).

5.4.1. *Everyday insecurity and omnipresent enemies*

The overview of the main coding categories presented in earlier sections has revealed that Mélenchon and LFI frame insecurity in terms of threats and metaphorical language, presenting a number of issues with these conceptual lenses. What does this tell us about what insecurity is for them, more broadly?

Looking at the empirical evidence from a qualitative perspective, we can notice how, for Mélenchon and LFI, insecurity seems to emerge as a condition of vulnerability that affects individuals in their daily lives. In other words, Mélenchon and LFI mobilise what the literature calls everyday (in)security. Everyday (in)security "casts light on how people experience, understand and perceive security and insecurity in their everyday, habitualised lives" (Bilgic and Gkouti 2021, 488; see also, Crawford and Hutchinson 2015).

The key message of this narrative is thus that insecurity is **everywhere** and the people are essentially insecure in their everyday life. This goes from the practical insecurity affecting citizens' ability to get secure jobs, safe housing, access to health support or clean water, to the more complex insecurity surrounding the sustainability of the democratic system, at home and abroad, or the sustainability of the planet.

In Mélenchon's and LFI's narrations, everyday insecurities include the individual-level **economic** insecurity stemming from unemployment and precarious work conditions, but also the 'total judicial insecurity' stemming from changes to the labour code. They also include the **political** insecurity relating to the loss of control over sovereignty and the danger posed by careless elites who 'rape' democracy on a daily basis. Insecurity is also a general, tense atmosphere that surrounds France's borders, with Spain 'in the midst of a regionalist crisis' (i.e., Catalonia in 2017) or Britain in a 'Brexit chaos' (LFI; Editorial, 31 October 2017; Mélenchon; Blog, 1 October 2017a). For Mélenchon:

Germany will again become a serious problem for Europe. But has it ever ceased to be? The selfishness of the German ruling caste is certainly the most bitter and violent in all of Europe. (Mélenchon; Blog, 1 October 2017b).

Everyday insecurities also concern the **environmental** anxieties about both the present and the future of the planet, since 'the house is already burning' as a consequence of the threats posed by climate change (LFI; Editorial 18 February 2019).

The narrative on everyday insecurity also taps on widespread **societal** anxieties such as the inadequate standards that harm food security and health, the unequal access to safe housing and basic resources such as water or the shutting down of basic services such as post offices and railways routes that 'give a measure of the danger'. The examples below further corroborate the idea that really 'everything' seems to be put in danger by elites:

#AmatorialSport The drastic reduction in the number of assisted contracts and the brutal cuts in the budget of the Ministry of Sports endanger amateur clubs and the entire community/citizen fabric of popular sport. (LFI; Twitter, 1 October 2018)

We must defend our food sovereignty and save the sugar industry in France! (LFI; Twitter, 7 May 2019)

The EU is endangering our cheeses, especially the PDOs [Protected Designation of Origin]. We must defend them (LFI; Twitter, 14 May 2019)

These quotes exemplify why I am labelling Mélenchon's and LFI's insecurity discourse a narrative of 'everyday insecurity'. By showing how themes like sport and food can be communicated as part of a relationship of insecurity, the tweets confirm that the language of insecurity is pervasive in their communication and can be applied to every domain to ultimately portray the entire existence of the people as insecure. The relevance of the people is particularly evident in the sport tweet, as the adjective 'popular' (*populaire*) is commonly used by LFI to indicate the possession "of the people". The narrative of everyday insecurity can also be thought of as communicating 'moral insecurity' because, at its core, it is a narrative that foregrounds the harm directed at the good, *ordinary* people.

The everyday insecurity narrative (re)produces everyday insecurities by linking them to a wider context, both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, the discourse emphasises how these insecurities are not individual but collective. As Mélenchon and LFI posit insecurity in relation to the 'country', European 'societies' and 'humanity' as a whole, they represent it as a challenge for communities from the local to the global level, rather than for single individuals. In turn, this component of *sharedness* in the narrative highlights two further aspects of insecurity. First, it highlights the legitimacy of the people to feel insecure and demand action. By positing *the people* as a subject of insecurity, the narrative empowers them to reclaim security. To put it differently, the

everyday insecurity narrative delineates who *merits* security: security is not what works for the state, the economy or the elites; it is the people who are entitled to security. Second, the sharedness of the everyday insecurity narrative highlights the collective form that the fight ahead will need to take. Mélenchon and LFI underline that the fight against everyday insecurity and its causes is collective, as it is ‘its solution’, most notably through a ‘citizens’ revolution’ that would clear off the establishment (see Chapter 4: Case Study and Method).

Vertically, the narrative locates insecurities as part of a cause-effect mechanism engineered by elites’ behaviour in a context of harmful globalisation and neoliberalism. In doing this, the narrative of everyday insecurity renders enemies *omnipresent* by evidencing and making *visible* the effect of the danger they pose. The elite-enemies present two key characteristics: they are a multitude and they produce multiform threats. The quote below exemplifies this: in closing his 2017 campaign, Mélechon summarised his political project by making the multitude of enemies clearcut:

We must separate the Republic from the lobbies that threaten the environment and our health, [we must] stop the omnipotence of finance, abolish the presidential monarchy and the privileges of the caste that rules everything. It’s time to become a sovereign and independent people again, freed from the European treaties and warlike military alliances. (Mélenchon; Blog, 21 April 2017)

For Mélechon, ‘they’ are the lobbies, finance, the abusive and authoritarian political system, the EU and NATO and *they* pose a number of economic, environmental, political and military threats, which we explore below.

5.4.2. *The insecurity-bundle*

If the first narrative identifies insecurity and enemies ‘everywhere’, the second narrative points out that these insecurities are not single, isolated issues but should rather be considered in connection to one another. The central theme is the idea that insecurity is never a one-dimensional issue. I am naming this the ‘bundle’ narrative because this type of story articulates insecurity by evidencing the interconnectedness among a variety of issues. Insecurity thus becomes a multi-dimensional phenomenon that resides in different crises and/or endangers multiple referent objects.

There are many examples of this narrative. For instance, the trade agreement signed between the EU and Canada (CETA) is a recurrent projection of insecurity bundles as LFI sees it as an ‘*ecological, geopolitical and social* crime’, as well as a ‘crime against democracy’ (LFI; Editorial 19 September 2017), while Mélenchon frames it as a ‘direct threat’ to small and medium enterprises, and to the agricultural sector, as well as a ‘threat to democracy’ (Mélenchon; Blog 22 February 2017). Similarly, Macron’s 2017 electoral programme is described as a source of *social, ecological and democratic* insecurity (LFI; Editorial 16 May 2017) and Macron himself as ‘the president’ of *social, ecological and economic* ‘disorder’ (LFI; Editorial 23 July 2018, 20 August 2018). Dangers emanating from EU membership are also multifaceted, most notably in terms of *social, ecological and economic* threats (LFI; Editorial 17 September 2018). Climate change is similarly linked to different aspects of security:

The environmental emergency is also a geopolitical emergency. Climate change endangers world peace and the UN has just recognized its delay in taking into account this major issue for world security. (LFI; Twitter, 17 July 2018)

More recently, the pandemic has become a prominent example of the insecurity bundle narrative. The health crisis has been positioned in the framework of 'other crises': a *socio-economic* crisis because the effects of lockdowns are linked to the crisis of capitalism; a *political* crisis because the pandemic has only reinforced the 'authoritarian' character of Macron's presidency resulting in a state of 'permanent coup'. For Mélenchon, "the starting point of the #coronavirus health disaster is ecological because it is linked to the predation that we exert on nature" (Mélenchon; Twitter, 17 April 2020) which is a prelude to the *ecological* crisis 'to come' (LFI; Editorial 24 August 2020). As Mélenchon puts it:

Certainly the moment is dark. Hard. Dangerous. Global crises overlap. Climate, finances, employment, health. On all sides, the balances of the past are breaking without anything better ahead [for us]. The authoritarian evolution of the Macronist regime raises fears of the worst. But isn't this also the moment when people can best understand the need for a profound break with the system that produced these disasters? (Blog, 18 December 2020)

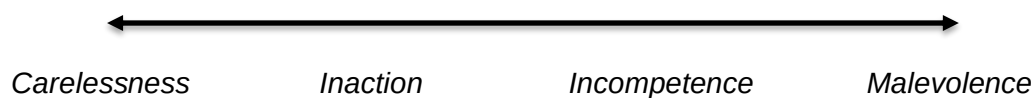
These examples illustrate how 'insecurity bundles' are a central element of how Mélenchon and LFI construct and develop their insecurity narratives. The bundle narrative highlights the multifaceted aspect of each insecurity source, adding layers of complexity to what contemporary insecurity is. In addition to contextualising the complexity of insecurity by adding these layers, the narrative also gives insecurity a certain order that helps make sense of it. The bundle links insecurity to a web of past, present and future, by articulating present insecurity as a result of a previous crisis or as aggravating in the long run as in the Covid-19 example we have just seen.

The following section shows how these narratives are then linked to behaviour of elites as producers of insecurity.

5.4.3. *Elites' failures and the aggravation of insecurity*

In these stories, everyday insecurity is the product of what we could call “elites’ failure”. According to this narrative, elites fail to live up to acceptable standards of good leadership and governance and, in doing so, they negatively affect the everyday life of their citizens. Elites’ behaviour is therefore a space for the production of insecurity. Elites’ failure can be imagined as a continuum of behaviours that go from carelessness to intentional malevolence.

Figure 5.5: Continuum of elites’ insecurity production



Elites do not care about the ‘general interest’; they could do something about it but they decide not to. Macron, for instance, is deemed ‘directly responsible’ for the loss of jobs linked to the sale of a telecommunication company. According to Mélenchon, “he could have made arrangements...He did not do it. He could legally prevent it and didn’t” (Blog, 19 June 2018).

In addition, elites do not act for the general interest because they side with the ‘particular’ interest, an idea exemplified in the excerpts below:

LREM prefers to defend the rich rather than the climate. (LFI; Twitter, 21 May 2019)

If the climate were a bank, it would already be rescued. (Mélenchon; Blog, 25 February 2019).

Today's Europe 'protects' who? The bankers, the tax evaders, the multinationals, the big polluters, the producers of glyphosate. Certainly not the citizens whose vote in the 2005 referendum was ignored, nor democracy. (LFI; Twitter, 5 March 2019)

This representation of illegitimacy is also linked to a presumed ‘hate and fear’ for the people and a willingness to do ‘anything against them’ (Mélenchon; Blog, 18 February 2019). In contrast, LFI MPs are described as “the MPs of the people”, “who look like you” and “defend the general rather than the particular interest” (LFI; Twitter 14 and 16 June 2017).

Elites’ incompetence is also portrayed as making them unable to lead the country, especially in times of crisis. During the pandemic, for instance, LFI emphasised that the government’s management of the ‘war against the virus’ did not measure up to the challenge. By contrast and ironically, the elites’ ‘good qualities’ such as zeal are only put to work when they implement measures that are counter-productive to the general interest, most notably when applying EU directives.

Finally, elites’ behaviour can be intentionally harmful. For Mélenchon, for example, the past governments in France have *methodically* destroyed the capacity of control of the state (Blog, 6 February 2018). Similarly underlying the intentional production of insecurity, Mélenchon argued that:

The government wants to re-authorise neonicotinoid pesticides. They know how dangerous it is for health, biodiversity and the environment. They act knowingly. (Mélenchon; Twitter, 6 October 2020)

As these examples show, elites comprehensively fail to ensure citizens’ security because of their actions, inaction and incompetence. Hence, regardless of their position on the continuum, this narrative emphasises the idea that elites are direct producers of insecurity. The key point that this narrative communicates is that, be it because of carelessness or malevolence, elites’ actions are essentially a danger to the people. As Mélenchon puts it:

They are responsible. They are guilty. Yet those who put the world in this state still expect to impose on us their solutions to the problems they

caused! We believe them incapable of doing so and always dangerous as well. (Blog, 13 April 2020)

In many cases, elites also *aggravate* insecurity. LFI uses this term to describe Macron's government formation as a 'gathering' of all the 'factors' that will aggravate rather than solve the 'social, ecological and democratic crises that plague the country' (Editorial, 23 May 2017). All directionality of action is subject to this judgement: aggravation is linked to action, inaction, regression and acceleration. In LFI's words, "In the face of urgency, both inaction and regression are to blame. The European Union and the power in France are leading us into the wall in acceleration" (Editorial, 18 February 2019).

The idea of complicity between elites is also a key staple of this narrative. Similarly to the people, elites are a homogeneous, collective group of actors espousing values opposite to that of the French Republic, for example, oppression and authoritarianism versus liberty. They also act for the 'particular' rather than the general interest, and aim at their own advancement. The previous metaphor on EU and French 'power' behind the wheel of a car crashing France to a wall, captures the widely recurrent theme of an inescapable bond between Macron's presidency and the damages brought about by EU governance. As Mélenchon argues,

In the end we cannot dissociate the rejection of *Macronie* from the rejection of the European Union treaties which destroy our country. (Mélenchon; Blog, 26 December 2019)

The idea of complicit elites serves to discursively homogenise them as representing the same values and as jointly producing insecurity, as shown in the examples below:

They are preparing a big alliance: PS, EELV, LREM/Renaissance, LR. This big coalition is a danger! (LFI; Twitter, 21 May 2019)

End of the world, end of the month - same culprits, same fight! (LFI; Twitter, 15 March 2019)

Additional actors than ‘the establishment’ are also involved, such as the police, the judicial system and the media. The police are repeatedly described as the oppressive weapon that implements the government’s authoritarianism on the ground; the judicial system as the legal tool to conduct the government’s ‘judicial war’, also labelled ‘lawfare’; finally, the media as the instrument to wage the political war on civic grounds. The three are occasionally brought together at once and described as a ‘dangerous convergence’.

In summary, the elites’ failure narrative identifies insecurity and its aggravation as the production of elite misbehaviour. It fosters the homogenisation of elites by portraying them as groups complicit in one another’s actions and thus guided by the same values and interests. The narrative is an ideational resource that is activated and mobilised to understand new social events as they emerge. This was evident with the covid pandemic, as Mélenchon argued that:

Evil continues its work. Absolute evil, the evil that has brought us to the door of these deserts of lockdowns. (Blog, 12 December 2020).

By linking the recent health crisis to the misbehaviour of evil elites in previous years, the party interprets new events in an act of continuity with the past, activating the narrative that frames the elites as responsible.

5.5. The security imaginary

The analysis of narrative structure and content performed so far, allows us to delineate Mélenchon and LFI’s security imaginary.

As mentioned previously, the concept of “security imaginary” has its origins in International Relations and broadly refers to the ‘structure of well-established meanings and social relations out of which representations of the world of international relations are created’ (Weldes 1999: 10). The foundational claim behind the concept of a security imaginary is that through the writing and rewriting of security, the threatened Self is demarcated from the threatening Other (Loffman 2021). As the concept is mostly adopted in IR, it places particular emphasis on the geopolitical spaces of insecurity and on how the practices of foreign policy in particular help demarcate ‘the Inside from the Outside’ (Campbell 1992). Here I use the concept of a security imaginary more generally as a set of ideational resources that allow political actors to delineate their vision of security dynamics and identity construction.

The qualitative analysis that unpacked Mélenchon’s and LFI’s insecurity stories in the previous section, has shown that their articulation of contemporary security, revolves around a clear arrangement of the subject-object relation: the people are victims of everyday insecurity and the elites are directly or indirectly dangerous. This is evidenced in the word clouds summarising who are the main sources of insecurity and who is said to be affected by it. The people represent a space of unity, characterised by the sharedness of the everyday insecurity experience. Indeed the insecurities they experience help define their identity as an insecure people, binding them together. The elites, on the other hand, are a space of insecurity production. Crucially, the process contrasts the insecure people *against* the threatening elites, showing how the insecurity logic demarcates the division people/elite. This makes the narration inherently populist because the dynamics identifying the people and the elites as agents of (in)security are clearly shaped by people-centrism and anti-elitism.

Zooming into 2020 is useful to understand the politics of insecurity as communicated by LFI and Mélenchon. This is because 2020 is the year in which the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, plunging France, Europe and the rest of the world into a spiral of death that for months countries were unable to halt or manage. It is significant that in a year dominated by the physical, societal and economic dangers produced by the pandemic, Mélenchon and his party identify the relationship of insecurity to be between 'Macron' and 'us'. As the figures above visualise, these two are the most frequent source and recipient of insecurity in 2020, across blogs, editorials, YouTube Reviews of the Week and tweets. This evidence further supports the hypothesis that Mélenchon's and LFI's politics of insecurity is first and foremost populist.

The thick ideology that characterises the party provides an ideational contribution to the process as well, most notably in *the way* the demarcation line is drawn. As we have seen, one of the reasons the elites are inherently dangerous is their connection to neoliberalism. Hence, LFI's anti-neoliberal critique enriches the characterisation of the insecurity story by providing additional insights into the motives behind elites' dangerous behaviour. This is however only one of the reasons that make the elites inherently dangerous, together with their authoritarian tendencies and incompatibility with the values of the Republic. This aspect makes Mélenchon's and LFI's insecurity narratives rather distinctive, as for them elites are not just one-dimensionally harmful (i.e., culturally, as it would be for the radical right) but multidimensionally so.

5.6. Narrative logic and function

While the Narrative Structure section has detailed the components of the insecurity story as understood by Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, the section on Narratives Content has illustrated how these components come together in ordered stories that convey specific messages. In this section, I expand the qualitative analysis by looking at how the narratives can be broken down into two subgroups, based on the main logic they follow.

The first group of narratives follow a **top-down logic**. They discuss a wider problem highlighting its complexity and often spotlighting the mistaken approach adopted by those in power. This is then linked to the programmatic solutions proposed by LFI. In this regard, references to *L'Avenir en Commun* (LAEC - the party programme) were particularly relevant during election years but generally remained a staple in the way the party communicates because it allows them to keep the attention high on their programmatic signature themes. For example, discussions on climate change and the destruction of biodiversity are linked to the 'ecological planning', 'ecological bifurcation' and 'green rule' that the party proposes as its key measures to address the environmental challenges. Issues concerning the unresponsiveness of the political system are linked to the 'citizens revolution' and the 'sixth republic', the party's shortcuts for giving sovereignty back to the people. Discussions on a variety of themes concerning the EU are linked back to the necessity to either revisit the treaties or leave the EU, which are summarised in what the party calls respectively Plan A and Plan B. Hence the contents of LAEC, especially in terms of the 'slogans' that summarise the party's political project, are vital to *ground* the discussions on the production of insecurity on clear measures to address it. Crucially, the programme's name has not

been significantly updated and the key slogans have not changed, hence Mélenchon campaigned for the 2022 presidential elections once again under the LAEC platform.

The second group of narratives follow a **bottom-up logic**. They start from discussing a specific topic to show how it is part of a bigger problem or a higher cause, allowing the party to clarify its general vision on a number of societal questions. For example, the discussion on the privatisation of Paris airport is presented as ‘more than just protesting’: according to LFI, it is a ‘republican fight’ against the values imposed by Macron’s policies and neoliberalism more generally (LFI; Editorial, 23 August 2019). The need for reforms and regulations on how the media work is articulated as being about ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’ and ‘defending the quality of information’ and not simply about contesting ‘media trials’ and the ‘scandalisation of politics’.

In these ways, the two logics show how the insecurity narratives are crucial resources to legitimate the party agenda. Overall we can identify three key functions of these narratives.

First, as we have seen, the insecurity narratives link to the party both programmatically, because they show how specific policy proposals can tackle insecurity and restore safety; they also link to the party ideologically, because they show how everyday themes can be situated in the realm of ideas and are part of the vision of society it wants to pursue. Through insecurity narratives, the party legitimates its programmatic proposals and vision because it grounds them in the resolution of what it poses as contemporary anxieties for the people.

In addition to the legitimacy function, insecurity narratives also symbolically marginalise and silence the opponents from ‘speaking security’. In grouping all ‘elites’ as key agents in the production of everyday insecurities, LFI aims at discrediting their ideas and policy proposals. When Mélenchon remarks, as in one of the quotes

proposed earlier, that elites think they can suggest solutions to the problems they have caused, he essentially attempts to diminish their credibility in providing effective responses to insecurity challenges.

Finally, insecurity narratives problematise the concept of sovereignty, at the core of the party ideology. The need to regain popular sovereignty is presented in relation to a number of insecurity issues, from food security to economic anxieties. In doing so, the party shows that the ability of the people to 'take back' power applies well beyond 'political' sovereignty and the control of representative institutions. Through insecurity narratives, LFI illustrates the need for the people to control how decisions are made in the industrial, energetic, agricultural sectors as well as at the supranational and international levels. Hence insecurity narratives are functional to extend a key populist pillar of the party's ideology - popular sovereignty - to a variety of domains and to conceptualise security as the space of sovereign decisions.

5.6.1. From narratives to policies

Looking at the party programme for the 2022 presidential elections is useful to further understand the interpretation of the data provided in this chapter. The programme shows a number of policy proposals that can be traced back to the insecurity narratives examined here, suggesting that insecurity can indeed be an ideational resource Mélenchon and his party mobilise to legitimate their political agenda and proposals. The table below summarises the connection between some specific narratives and the programme.

Table 5.7: Key policy proposals from LFI's party programme L'Avenir En Commun and corresponding narratives

Narrative	Suggested measure
NATO is dangerous and a source of violence	NATO withdrawal
The elites' (in)action concerning climate change is criminal	Recognition of the crime of 'ecocide'
Agro-business produces dangerous products while the media encourage life-threatening obesity through advertising	Law on 'food security'
Elites are a threat to the people	Citizens' revolution

One of the key signatures of the programme proposes France's withdrawal from NATO. Throughout the years, such a measure has been justified precisely based on the 'dangerous', 'violent' and 'criminal' behaviour of NATO, and the harms it causes to France and the rest of the world by driving international conflict. Based on this narrative, LFI campaigns to leave the organisation and regain France's political and military sovereignty, while also signalling France's rejection of the 'immoral' engagement with global war pushed by global powers such as the US.

A second example concerns the proposal to introduce a crime of 'ecocide' at the international level, to sanction crimes against the environment and mass pollution, for examples by multinational corporations. This taps precisely onto the insecurity-by-association frame that we have examined here, as the elites' negligence towards the environment has been consistently labelled as a crime or 'climaticide'. By using this type of framing, the insecurity traditionally associated with crime 'spills over' to the elites' action and the recognition of this as a formal crime is the culmination of this discursive process.

Mélenchon is also campaigning on the need for a 'food insecurity' law that would highly regulate the food industry, for example by setting limits on salt, sugar and saturated fats, banning the use of pesticides and monitoring advertising practices. This measure builds on a combination of the narratives presented in this chapter, as it brings together the dangers the 'agro-business' poses to health and the environment, the obesity threat encouraged by media advertising, the widespread economic precarity and the dangerousness of pesticides.

Finally the party's signature proposal, of clearing off the establishment and establishing a sixth republic, is profoundly grounded in insecurity narratives, as it is premised on the idea that elites are an existential threat to the people.

Although some of these actions are grounded in traditional left-wing principles (such as the anti-imperialistic critique against NATO), these proposals have a populist core. They all target elites as sources of insecurity and propose restoring safety with actions that limit their power, punish them or clear them off entirely. This supports the hypothesis that insecurity narratives help the party legitimate its agenda, marginalise elites and underscore the security provided by sovereign decisions.

5.6.2. Counternarratives

Mélenchon and LFI use insecurity framing also to produce counternarratives that help the party reappropriate and change the direction of the insecurity-talk promoted by opponents. There are several notable examples.

The first is the counternarrative on **Russia**: Mélenchon relentlessly repeats that, contrary to what the French establishment, the EU and Western powers argue, Russia 'is not a threat'. This expression seems to serve two functions. First, it discredits the

'establishment's' diagnosis of international affairs by negating their identification of Russia as a security menace; second, it sets the stage for the party to provide its own interpretation of security affairs. Indeed, the expression is often followed by the identification of what or better 'who' is the danger at hand, mostly the US and the EU itself. As Mélenchon puts it:

We can clearly see that all this is an agitation made to scare people. To make you believe in a danger that does not exist. (RDLS n.13, 6 January 2017).

A second example concerns the **EU plans for a common defence policy**. This is a 'traditional' security theme that is reappropriated by Mélenchon via insecurity framing. In his counternarrative, 'a Europe of defence means a Europe of war', which has become a slogan reiterated for years and across his publications. This counternarrative attempt shifts attention to insecurity as violence and aggression, establishing the EU as a generator of both.

A third example concerns **migration**. For Mélenchon and LFI, migration is generally linked to insecurity but for different reasons than for the radical right. Rather than the 'threat' migrants allegedly pose to EU societies, here the focus is on the insecurities generated by the EU and NATO on migrants' countries of origins as shown in the quote below:

We at LFI keep repeating the obvious: the only rational discussion to have on the subject of immigration is that of the reasons for leaving. The European Union bears its share of responsibility when it destroys subsistence farming and the chances of development by imposing unequal trade agreements. The disorders caused by NATO and its wars too. Not to mention the first cause of population displacement: global warming. (Mélenchon; Blog, 13 May 2019).

This counternarrative produces a double relationship of insecurity, as migrants are still (although implicitly) deemed as a ‘problem’ while the EU and NATO are portrayed as the root causes of this insecurity issue.

Finally, one last example concerns the **COVID pandemic**. In this case, Mélenchon criticised Macron’s attempts at channelling insecurity and urgency around the crisis. For instance, when Macron argued that France was in a health crisis, Mélenchon was quick to add that:

We are in a serious crisis. But it is not only health: it is social and political.
(Twitter, 26 April 2020).

Similarly, when Macron narrated the crisis as a ‘war with the virus’, Mélenchon ridiculed his choice of words, although this is an example of the ‘insecurity by association’ frame that Mélenchon and LFI use substantially - as shown earlier in this chapter. On that occasion, Mélenchon argued that:

The vocabulary of war is ridiculous and harmful. We need health mobilization planning. It is a question of social organization. The only enemy is the inconsistency and weakness of the public service. (Twitter, 24 March 2020).

As these examples show, when encountering other insecurity narratives, Mélenchon shifts the discussion with opposite frames, attempting to reappropriate those frames and recreate new relationships of insecurity with the actors and factors he considers to be the main insecurity challengers.

Before concluding the chapter, the following section delves into the narratives of the populist radical right and the mainstream left to better contextualise the research findings.

5.7. A comparison with the populist right and the mainstream left

To better understand and situate these research findings, I examined the communication of *Rassemblement National* (RN) and *Parti Socialiste* (PS) in 2020. I focused on this year because, as mentioned earlier, 2020 was a year dominated by the pandemic, which can be considered a source of profound insecurity in and of itself, as it generated existential threats of physical, economic, societal and political nature. *Rassemblement National* and *Parti Socialiste* represent, respectively, the populist radical right and the mainstream left in France.

It is useful to compare them with LFI to better understand how ideologies characterised the framing and narration of insecurity in 2020. This allows us to observe where a leftist but non-populist actor, and a populist but non-leftist actor identified relationships of insecurity in their communication. To put it differently, this comparison along different dimensions (populist, non-populist, left, right) allows to identify what thick and thin ideological features seem to bear most weight in the interpretation of contemporary insecurity.

Table 5.8: Total frequency of insecurity frames in *Rassemblement National* and *Parti Socialiste* press releases in 2020

<i>Insecurity as/by</i>	Rassemblement National	Parti Socialiste
Threat	48	7
Uncertainty	9	4
Protection	30	9
Association	12	6

Table 5.9: Total frequency of insecurity types in Rassemblement National and Parti Socialiste press releases in 2020

<i>Insecurity type</i>	Rassemblement National	Parti Socialiste
Economic	26	9
Environmental	5	3
Societal	50	15
Political	6	2
Military	0	0

Starting from the *frequency* of insecurity-centred discourse in the communication of RN in 2020, 104 texts contained at least one security frame, out of a total sample of 430 (c.a. 25%), with a predominance of the language of threat (i.e., the ‘insecurity as threat’ frame), followed by an emphasis on protection (i.e. the ‘insecurity as the need for protection’ frame) (see Table 5.8 above).

In terms of the types of insecurity which were mobilised the most in the party’s communication, societal security was the highest, followed by economic insecurity (see Table 5.9. above). This may be surprising at first glance, as RN seems to refer more often than LFI to how jobs were threatened from a variety of sources. Overall RN’s communication places particular emphasis on stories of economic insecurity, alongside cultural and societal threats. However, this can be a result of the populist competition at play between the two parties and a result of RN’s own effort in ‘de-demonising’. As scholars of French politics have noted, RN has expanded its economic platform in the last decade, explicitly appealing to the French working class (Ivaldi 2016; Mayer 2013). Besides competing with the mainstream and radical left for blue-collar votes, scholars argue that this is also part of Marine Le Pen’s strategy of de-demonisation, aimed at presenting RN as a legitimate and responsible political

actor, with a broad policy platform that is no longer narrowed to the domain of cultural insecurity.

In terms of *content*, the qualitative analysis identified that such frames delineated a relationship of insecurity of clear nativist-populist nature (see Figure 5.8 and Figure 5.9 below).

Figure 5.8: Sources of Insecurity for Rassemblement National in 2020



The ‘traditional’ enemies of the populist radical right are here identified as the main sources of insecurity: ‘immigration’, ‘terrorism’, ‘Islam’, ‘Macron’ and his ‘government’. This means that throughout 2020, RN did not discuss insecurity as emanating from the pandemic but from ‘elites’ (both national and supranational) and ‘dangerous others’. In the early phases, for instance, the COVID-19 emergency was re-elaborated as an indirect threat linked to immigration, free movement and the inability of elites to respect the will of the people:

While the culpable absurdity of the globalist, borderless and free trade ideology of the European Union is brought to light by a major health crisis coupled with an unprecedented migration crisis, this technocratic construction continues - despite everything - its mad race towards the establishment of an omnipotent supra-state system which the people do not want. (6 April 2020)

This is because, for RN, the immediate solution to the crisis laid in borders closures.

As argued the following day:

Only the national scale and the borders allow the return to security (7 April 2020)

In another example, a few days later, the pandemic crisis was directly blamed on the failure of elites to protect the French borders and with them, the 'health of French people':

By allowing migrants to benefit from the privilege of coming and going as they please, the Government is putting the health of French people at risk. The authorities thus take responsibility for the uncontrolled spread of the virus. The national interest and the security of the French people are threatened by the irresponsibility and laxity of our leaders. (10 April 2020)

The focus on borders continued through May 2020, when the party argued that:

The French decision to leave the national borders wide open, while the other European countries keep them closed, is only the fruit of an ideological operation to resuscitate the moribund Schengen area to the detriment of the health security of the French. (5 May 2020)

This suggests that the party's anti-elitism and nativism were central ideational resources in making sense of the events of 2020. Similarly to Mélenchon and LFI, the focus of insecurity narratives was not on the pandemic per se; it was rather its antecedents and consequences that were articulated as threats and dangers, for instance, globalisation, the economic downturn, or the lockdown. Unlike Mélenchon and LFI, however, the most frequent sources of insecurity for RN had to do with

This denotes a clear difference with the populism of LFI, as the definition of ‘the people’ for the latter is not grounded in nativist references to France and French nationality but rather in the civic nationalism and an inclusive group that adheres to French ‘republican’ values. Hence, for each strand of populism, there is a clear *overlap* in the narrations of who are the ‘victims of insecurity’ (the people) but a clear *divergence* around who belong to ‘the people’ more generally: the people as ethnos for the radical right and the people as demos for the radical left.

Figure 5.10: Sources of Insecurity for Parti Socialiste in 2020



Moving on to Parti Socialiste (PS), its communication on insecurity in 2020 was higher than RN at 33% (22 (in)security-relevant texts in a total sample of N=65). However, its interpretation of insecurity in 2020 took a rather different direction compared to both RN and LFI. For the party, the principal sources of insecurity were the ‘health’ and ‘climate’ ‘crises’ (see Figure 5.10 above), alongside the new ‘security law’ (*loi securite globale*). Unlike RN and LFI, there was little to no personalisation of insecurity at play in its narratives, with the ‘government’ mentioned only one time. During the very early

phases of the pandemic, the PS adopted the narrative that France was 'at war' with Covid-19, a common narrative also among populist parties (Wondreys and Mudde 2020):

We are in a state of war against a virus with potentially disastrous consequences, especially for the most vulnerable French people. (14 March 2020)

Not much later, however, the pandemic was linked more broadly to other global crises, most notable climate change, as shown in the examples below:

It's not a question of [re]starting again [after the pandemic, acting] "as before", in the indifference to the threats that weigh on the planet. [It's a question] of reorienting our policy towards the fight against social and territorial inequalities, and the climatic and ecological imperative. (12 April 2020)

Scientists are increasing their alerts on the risks of seeing global warming, the decline in biodiversity and deforestation favour the circulation of viruses even more dangerous than Covid-19. (24 April 2020)

This suggests that after the shock of the early weeks, the party started to make sense of the pandemic by integrating it in its broader understanding of the world. This was further consolidated in the more mature phases of the pandemic when the political debate centred on recovery plans. In that case, the PS highlighted how certain referent objects were in need of protection, marking a clear contrast with the positions of the government, which was said to prioritise the recovery of 'commercial' activities more than anything else. For the PS:

Engaging in a massive recovery plan by giving communities the means and skills to allow the economy to rebound is necessary in order to preserve jobs, protect the most vulnerable French people, support businesses and amplify the ecological and social transition. (30 June 2020)

We defend culture, because today, the government's choices reflect a political and societal project based solely on consumerism and the arbitrary reopening of places that [the government considers] more legitimate. (15 December 2020)

safety, disruption to the economy, political unrest and general uncertainty generated by events such as a pandemic.

5.8. Summary

With an eye to narrative structure and content, this chapter has shown that the politics of insecurity is a crucial resource that helps Mélenchon and LFI articulate the struggle between the people and the elites and legitimate their party agenda.

Insecurity narratives appear central in the homogenisation of the people, channelling their experiences of everyday insecurity and reproducing an identity as an 'insecure people'. They are also pivotal for homogenising the elites not simply into an oppositional group, but into a group that is indisputably pinpointed as a source of danger, and hence is considered harmful in nature and intent. Strikingly, even when talking about the traditional issues the radical left owns, such as the anti-capitalist critique, Mélenchon links this to the battle between the 'particular interest' and the 'general interest', which for him is a shortcut to express an interpretation of the social conflict as a populist struggle between a people and some elites, rather than between classes. Overall these elements suggest that Mélenchon and LFI perform a politics of insecurity that is populist at heart, that is, has significant elements of populist narratives, although additionally shaped by their neoliberal critique and rejection of authoritarianism.

The next chapter will examine the expert interview data and discuss the role of populist vs left-wing ideas in Mélenchon's and LFI's insecurity narratives, alongside the reasons *why* Mélenchon and LFI have incorporated the politics of insecurity in their communication.

Chapter 6: Expert Interviews Study

6.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings originating from eight expert interviews conducted with academics who are specialists of *La France Insoumise* (LFI). The experts represent a composite group of academics who have published on Mélenchon and LFI, interviewed party officials in the past or worked closely with party activists. One academic is an active member of the party and is the author of the programmatic booklet on security that LFI presented at the 2022 elections. I discuss the expert interviews findings alongside a few newspaper interviews of LFI officials, which are particularly relevant to further elaborate on some points. The aim of this chapter is to answer the second research question: why does the populist radical left engage with the politics of insecurity, if this is associated with their (often-loathed) radical right competitor? Is it a matter of ideas or strategy?

The chapter explores a variety of aspects relating to how left-wing actors (including but also going beyond Mélenchon and LFI) approach the topic of (in)security. It starts off with an exploration of what makes the left ‘uncomfortable’ with security and how, in the French context, security is associated with a ‘game’ that the left can never ‘win’ (section 6.2). The chapter then discusses the meaning of security and insecurity for LFI, showing that, while there is a broad and detailed agenda going beyond law and order, this gets often side-lined by the party’s excessive focus on the police (section 6.3). The chapter further unpacks the communication of insecurity in LFI, by analysing the role of language (section 6.4) and the target audiences (section 6.5).

Such discussion will help transition to a crucial examination on the complex role that strategies (section 6.6) and ideas (section 6.7) can play in understanding the engagement with the politics of insecurity. In this part of the chapter, I will detail five strategic aims that experts linked to the politics of insecurity, arguing that the latter may provide Mélenchon and LFI with the advantage to a) resignify security, b) compete with Le Pen and c) with the Left, d) build credibility as a governing actor and finally e) conflictualise the elites to set a new agenda. In addition, I will also discuss how populist and radical left ideas can come together to evidence that the politics of insecurity is not a mere tool for LFI to acquire strategic relevance as a political actor; on the contrary, it can also be an ideational product originating from the combination of the two ideologies characterising the party's worldview. Before concluding, the chapter will also discuss the role of Mélenchon in guiding the party strategy (section 6.8).

6.2. Security and the Left

There was a strong consensus among the experts that 'security' is a problematic topic for the Left. When they mentioned security, experts intended it in the traditional sense of domestic security, hence issues relating to crime, law and order and the police. They highlighted that, when it comes to these themes, the French Left has either ignored them or gradually co-opted the lexicon proposed by the Right; however, in both cases, it has engaged in what appears to be a 'losing game'. This section will discuss these dynamics in more detail.

First of all, it seems that some parties on the Left have increasingly discussed issues relating to national security adopting the vocabulary usually utilised on the other side of the spectrum. For example, according to Marion Beauvalet (University of Paris-

Dauphine), during the last presidential election in France, “Fabien Roussel [the leader of the Communist party] adopted the words and analyses of the Right”, whereas for the Socialist Party (PS), this co-optation started much earlier. She told me that back in 1997, the PS:

Started using the words of the Right for the first time. For example, they said that the social context can't explain and justify everything; when the Left says this, it means that they put in the background the social context, which for me explains not everything, but many things. They chose the paradigm of the Right and it was a real rupture in France.

All experts agreed that, generally, left-wing parties perceive the topic of security as a losing game, because “when you fall on this topic, you are favouring the Right” (Manuel Cervera-Marzal, University of Liège). This is because, as Nicolas Hubé (University of Lorraine) explained, “each security theme has been pushed forward by the Right and there is the idea that the Left, the Socialist Party, was running after this”. When co-opting right-wing language or ideas, left parties do not appear genuine because of this ‘running after’ effect and hence because of a lack of originality and coherence. Delving into this in more detail, Martin Baloge (Catholic University of Lille) argued that:

The Left as a whole has played the security card and it's one of the reasons why the Left actually lost during the last years, because of this topic; the Right will always lead and will always benefit from a public debate on this topic, because it is one of the key pillars of their ideology. [...] The problem with security is that if you play the security card...normally you will lose, if you use it in a way that “we need more policemen, we need more security, we need more order”. If you use the card, it's the Right that is going to benefit from this, because the Left is less legitimate...for good or bad, not sure why...but the Left is [perceived as] less legitimate to handle this topic.

LFI is not immune from the ‘discomfort’ the topic generates. For Paolo Chiocchetti (European University Institute), “they are a little bit embarrassed to talk about it, they don’t know really how to approach the issue” and Mélenchon “is still embarrassed to talk about these topics, he prefers to talk about economic issues, in a straightforward

way, without talking too much about security. Sometimes he recognizes that this is a little bit...a losing area for the Left". Vincent Dain (University of Rennes) echoed this point:

The only thing I could say is that even in LFI they're not so comfortable with security and that when there are some affairs or things happening, like violence in the *banlieues*...it seems like they don't want so much to talk about it because they don't want to draw attention on it. Probably because they think that it will just fuel the National Rally if they start to talk about these issues. I don't have empirical confirmation of that...Well, I kind of have it, from the point of view of activists, who often say that "we shouldn't talk about this, because otherwise those who always win when we draw attention on it, it's the National Rally". [They say] "at least we should try to find another way to talk about these topics".

What renders the relation between security and the Left particularly problematic is that, as in many other European countries:

The insecurity topic is linked to immigration in France. All the time in the media, it's always linked to this. The Left is uncomfortable with this, because, basically, speaking about insecurity would mean blaming immigrants. I guess, this is why, recently at least. There is also a long tradition of the left not speaking about the matter of 'order'. I think, in the French context, this is the real problem. (Laura Chazel, Science Po Grenoble)

Given the populist radical right's mobilisation of these arguments, this type of 'security talk' is considered a questionable and opportunistic rhetoric aiming at scapegoating the vulnerable (see Chapter 2: Literature Review). As such, the left is wary of engaging in any similar narrations.

Overall the frictions with security have a negative impact on left-wing parties. Certainly, either co-opting the Right or ignoring security issues altogether negatively affects their stance in the eyes of the voters but, importantly, it also generates internal conflicts. LFI, for instance, appears to be quite divided on the topic; for the majority of the interviewees, there is an ideological dimension to this disagreement and this is highly relevant and felt within the party. Others argued there is also a territorial dimension to this internal conflict, but this was a minority opinion.

At the ideological level, it seems that many within the party associate ‘security’ with right-wing themes. As suggested by Laura Chazel from Science Po Grenoble:

People who were taking up too much of the right-wing themes were expelled from LFI. And it was because of their position on immigration [...]. They were speaking about insecurity, street insecurity, saying that the Left was not speaking about it enough.

While Mélenchon has been “very, very clear that he is not accommodating racism or far-right ideas” in LFI (Paolo Chiocchetti), party officials have often voiced their disagreement with the left’s ‘abandonment’ of security concerns. For George Kuzmanovic (Mélenchon’s former spokesperson and advisor on defence and international affairs for the 2017 presidential election) there is a ‘sociological’ problem:

The members of this Left are part of a spectrum that goes from middle-class civil servants to the very wealthy classes. They benefit from very solid cultural, social, symbolic and sometimes financial capital, which represent a form of protection from whatever the evolutions of society are. On the contrary, the working classes are exposed to these changes in an immediate way. There is a sociological gap that gives the left-wing bourgeoisie the impression that everything is going well, and that there are no issues with immigration or security” (Kuzmanovic on *Le Figaro*, 3 June 2022)

While Kuzmanovic left LFI to found his own party (*République Souveraine* - Sovereign Republic), key figures in LFI are still advocating for the party to address insecurity head-on. Discussing small criminality and ‘incivility’ in French suburban areas, François Ruffin (one of the key LFI’s MPs) argued on a Facebook post that went viral before the legislative elections of 2022 that:

This is the first mission, in my opinion, for the police, more than robberies, more than major crimes, more than checking papers: the tranquillity of everyday life. Being left-wing [does not mean] to turn a blind eye to it, on the contrary. (31 May 2022)

Laura Chazel added that Ruffin’s Facebook post was very much commented on in activist circles, most of the time in negative terms. This reminded her of the divisions

raised in Spain by an interview in which Inigo Errejón from Podemos discussed the Left in relation to security and order:

He was saying that the problem of [Pablo] Iglesias is that he has a vision of populism only [...] being 'against' things, while Errejón says "we have to be the Left able to represent order, we are the ones who are going to put order in society". [...] I remember that in the activist circles, they were saying "oh Errejón is speaking about security, he's right-wing, he switched to the right-wing side". In activist circles, this wasn't creating consensus at all, it was rejected.

Hence, like Podemos, LFI seems to suffer from the traditional association of security as a monopoly of the Right.

In addition to the ideological level, a minority pointed out a potential territorial dimension to LFI's intra-party divisions, especially following the recent success at the 2022 elections. According to Vincent Dain, LFI's focus on law and order (advocated by people like MP François Ruffin) is tied to the party's success in suburban areas. As he explained:

In 2017, most of LFI MPs were elected from suburban constituencies and Parisian areas, which are places in which the question of police brutality and police racism is definitely very important. I think the strategy is pretty much guided by the fact that they are elected from these constituencies and now 37% of the new elected MPs from LFI are from the Parisian area which is really, really, really a lot! But there are also MPs that were elected in, let's say, more rural areas [...] Some of them are coming to the French National Assembly with no special interests - in pure strategic term - to emphasize this topic. I talked about it with my aunt, who was elected MP for LFI last month, and she told me that this strategy is more likely to make her lose votes in her constituency, because she doesn't have so many suburban areas and racialised people in her constituency, who experience police racism in their everyday life. I think that many of them say that: "okay, this strategy is important because it's very important to politicise the issue of police brutality and if we don't do that no one will do it; so it is important, yes, but at the same time, from a pure electoral point of view, this is making us lose votes".

On the one hand, the party seems divided between those who feel that insecurity has been neglected and those who think it is now 'emphasised' too much. On the other hand, there is a perception that 'security' generates ideological 'contradictions'.

Interestingly, in response to these issues, it seems that the party is interested in a process of ‘resignification’ of security. According to the experts, this would allow LFI to ‘reappropriate’ the term, adapting it to left-wing ideas and articulating it in alternative, progressive ways (see Section 6.6. for an extended discussion). This process resembles the reappropriation of national symbols that LFI reclaimed in the elections of 2017. The link between the two processes was actually explicitly made by Manuel Bompard (the party’s spokesperson) in an interview published on 21 September 2017, where he declared:

We refuse to leave [to the National Front] the prerogative of certain subjects, such as secularism and the right to live in security in this country. At one point, we managed to be framed as those not concerned about security issues. But who are the first victims of security problems? They are not the bourgeois of the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris. We often talk about violence in working-class neighbourhoods, and the first victims of violence in working-class neighbourhoods are the inhabitants of these working-class neighbourhoods. We must not leave these **themes** to the National Front, nor leave them the **symbols**: the flag, the anthem. If anything has changed in this campaign, this is it. And not only in the countryside, in the [whole] country: people were proud to have the blue-white-red flag. It's something collective: when everyone starts to wave it, we say to ourselves "I'm like [them], I can wave it too". When only the *fachos* [fascists] wave the flag, we say to ourselves "I won't do it, otherwise [people] will think that I am like them". (emphasis added)

While I will discuss in greater detail the ‘resignification’ of security in section 6.6. on Strategic Aims, I will first explore what security actually means for LFI, what language the party uses around security topics and what audiences are targeted.

6.3. What is security?

Although any mention of ‘security’ led experts, instinctively, to talk about domestic security issues, the interviews tried to unpack what does security *really* mean for LFI.

Vincent Dain said that “police brutality is definitely the entry point: the way they are talking about security is mostly about that”. This is, however, “paradoxical” in his opinion:

They are one of the parties that have the broader, most detailed program about security. In general, LFI made a huge program, like 600 measures, that's kind of crazy, and they also have these thematic booklets about security. So there is this kind of paradox, that they are avoiding talking about insecurity, and when they're talking about security, it's always from the perspective of police violence!

In line with this understanding of security as ‘physical security’, Marion Beauvalet - the author of LFI’s booklet on security for the 2022 elections - confirmed that for LFI:

Security is the possibility to live in peace and be in *securité* [safe]. That's the first meaning: when you are in the streets or living your life, not to be attacked.

However, she also added that:

Security it's also a whole way of living your life; it's, for example, about having social security, with the welfare; to be in security is to be in good health, [to be able to] eat as much as you want, to be in security [means] to have enough money to get to the end of the month and not being poor.

There is an understanding, among academics and within the party, as Laura Chazel put it, “that insecurity is not only about crime”. The dimensions of domestic and physical security, however, remain dominant, as all experts mentioned it first when asked what security means for LFI. It was only when asked if they could think about any other form of insecurity beyond crime and law and order, that a variety of other insecurities started to emerge. These were summarised in the so-called ‘three emergencies’ that the party wishes to tackle (the democratic, social and ecological emergencies, see below), as they were perceived by the experts as a shortcut for what the party stands for in terms of addressing insecurity.

Indeed, the findings reported in Chapter 5, identified a series of insecurities that map squarely into those three emergencies. First, the threat to rights and liberties caused by Macron's authoritarian turn, as well as the president's accumulation of power, are said to endanger the French democratic system (the 'democratic emergency'). Second, a variety of social issues from poverty and housing to healthcare are presented as indicators of a widespread social crisis (the 'social emergency'). Finally, a number of environmental insecurities ranging from climate change to the destruction of the ecosystems are linked to a fundamental threat to civilisation (the 'ecological emergency'). Overall the experts' identification of the three emergencies as representing what LFI understands as security is important because it suggests the external validity of the thesis' communication findings.

Interestingly, these topics are also what all the experts identify as the party's core messages. When I asked them about the main themes they associated with the party, experts immediately suggested social justice, equality, the environment and police violence. Crucially, all experts identify these topics *before* they were primed to think in terms of what insecurities LFI tries to address. This is important because it shows that the party's core themes and the insecurities it discusses often overlap; this, in turn, suggests that the party performs a politics of insecurity around the topics that it *owns*, in a similar dynamic to the PRR. In the words of Laura Chazel, the three emergencies are "what structure the [discourse] of LFI".

Some academics also articulated an understanding of insecurity that adds further validation to this research's findings. For instance, Vincent Dain suggested that LFI attacks president Macron by tapping on the ideas of insecurity as the creation of uncertainty, chaos, disorder and disaster (as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3):

LFI is trying to build a counternarrative which consists in saying "you, Emmanuel Macron and your friends, you are the one creating the chaos in

the country, you are the one creating instability because you are destroying the hospitals, public services, you are destroying education, you are destroying stable jobs". So yes, now they are really using this rhetoric that **"we are the order and you are the disorder"**. This is something that Podemos used to use a lot at the beginning, like "the austerity policies are destroying the social security system, and we are going to bring back order to the country". And now, in this context of political instability, LFI are trying to use it too. (emphasis added)

This quote summarised some of the key points highlighted in this thesis. First, the idea that insecurity can be communicated with discourses that go beyond threat-framing and mobilise ideas of uncertainty and instability. Second, this quote exemplifies the concept proposed by this thesis - the *relationship of insecurity* - showing how it is externally perceived as a narrative of elites as producers of insecurity at the expense of the people. Finally, the idea that insecurity can spill over from one topic to the other when a particular language is used. For instance, the language of natural disaster, which echoes images of catastrophe and destruction, can help apply the lenses of insecurity to provide a renewed understanding of what can constitute a source of danger (see Chapters 2 and 5).

In this regard, a similar point was raised by Nicolas Hubé who suggested that Mélenchon is trying to raise awareness on fiscal evasion by arguing that "it's a crime like another not to pay taxes". This means that, by utilising a language of insecurity centring on 'crime', Mélenchon is wishing to delineate that particular topic as an issue of security.

In addition, Dain also mentioned that during the last presidential campaign, Mélenchon engaged in what we identified in Chapter 5 as an 'insecurity bundle'. With this term, I referred to a narrative that links insecurities with one another, hence articulating contemporary insecurity as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that resides

in different crises and/or endangers multiple referent objects. Unaware of the research finding but echoing it, Vincent Dain argued that:

During the [2022] presidential campaign Mélenchon talked a lot about the instability that the climate crisis and the environmental crisis are going to create, whether it is in France or at the international level, especially regarding migrations. I think there was one political rally in Marseille, in which he related the climate crisis to a lot of social, economic disorders, and international disorders, relating it also to the war in Ukraine.

In sum, (and in line with the communication findings discussed in the earlier chapter), all experts agree that Mélenchon and LFI conceive insecurity as a multifaceted phenomenon that affects contemporary societies from a political, socio-economic and environmental perspective. However, by first and foremost linking LFI's take on security with 'domestic security', experts confirmed that there is a mismatch between the party's complex understanding of security and the issues it prioritises the most. In the words of Vincent Dain:

[This complex understanding] is kind of 'evacuated' by the communication strategy of the party that tries to conflictualise police brutality. Then everyone, like the political class and the mainstream media, spends a lot of time saying that LFI doesn't really care about insecurity and it's always targeting the police. So there is a kind of a gap between their programmatic work and the image that they have in public scene.

6.4. The language of insecurity

My inquiry into understanding the language used around topics of insecurity produced two very different responses. At first, most of the respondents doubted that Mélenchon and LFI frame or discuss issues explicitly as relating to insecurity. However, after this initial negative response, experts gradually started acknowledging links between the key topics Mélenchon and LFI mostly talk about *and insecurity*.

For example, Martin Baloge first told me: “I do not have the impression that’s something that you will find in Mélenchon’s discourse”, but then realised:

Although...if you look at the way he handles the environment and nuclear [issues], it’s an actual instance...He’s against nuclear energy, and one of the key arguments is that, for him, it is not secure.

Manuel Cervera-Marzal thought that “they don’t use the term [insecurity] a lot, but this is just an impression”; however, he then added that “one of the words they use is ‘urgency’...*l’urgence*”. Laura Chazel was also unsure about whether insecurity is discussed explicitly, but she was certain that the three ‘emergencies’ (*urgences* in French) at the core of LFI’s electoral programme summarise the insecurity generated by complex contemporary issues:

[At LFI] they consider that there are three emergencies in France and the world actually, which are the democratic one, the social one and the ecological one. [...] I don’t know if they use the word ‘security’, but they are trying to clearly show that there is insecurity [linked] to these three things.

These interview passages confirm the intuition at the start of this project (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2), that is, the idea that security is closely associated with a narrow set of topics. Academics who are not familiar with the broadened understanding of security provided by constructivist approaches to International Relations theories, struggle at first to think about left-wing parties discussing ‘insecurity’. When I asked what was the first thing that came to mind when they heard the words ‘security and insecurity’, they all related the terms to crime. Although there is an understanding that, like other political actors, LFI and Mélenchon identify and articulate threats to their public, this is not acknowledged as a ‘security talk’. For example, Paolo Chiocchetti argued that:

The whole discourse of LFI is premised on the idea that the system that we are living in - globalised capitalism in general and more specifically the French political system and the fifth Republic -, are exploitative, oppressive,

bad and therefore they also cause a lot of problems which, in turn, may be a **threat** to the **security** of people, as well as their **very existence**. When they talk about climate change, when they talk about forced migration from the third world to Europe, when they talk about war: those are **threats** to individual human beings and to humanity in general. If it is framed explicitly as 'security', I'm not so sure; it is certainly framed as a huge problem, **as a threat**, but I'm not sure if it's really correct to associate it with the idea of security or if it's a strained interpretation of what they're doing. But for sure, the idea of **important threats** to individuals, people and humanity as a whole is very present in the discourse. (emphasis added)

This passage exemplifies the conceptual struggle in thinking about security beyond the idea of *physical* or *domestic* security. Within the party, however, this difference is fully understood and strategically weaponised. As Marion Beauvalet (author of LFI's programmatic booklet on security) maintained:

Saying that poverty or different insecurities are part of the security question, I think that - discursively - it is useful and efficient. But on the other hand, when we talk about security issues, we try to avoid the vocabulary that is imposed by the right. I think that **we use the words of security and insecurity for many topics, it's very transversal**, but we try, especially for [issues concerning] police and criminality, we try to avoid this lexicon. (emphasis added)

The party is aware that different forms of insecurity exist, and that explicitly labelling them insecurity issues is "useful and efficient". However, they refrain from utilising the insecurity lexicon when discussing domestic security issues, which in France are monopolised by Rassemblement National. This attention to the role of language further corroborates the idea that the party may be trying to resignifying security (as discussed in later sections).

6.5. Target audiences

All experts agreed that, when discussing insecurity (broadly defined), the party aims to reach three main groups. First, they are interested in mobilising and retaining their

“traditional constituency” of “far left and left-wing activists and voters”. Bringing the party’s internal perspective, Marion Beauvalet confirmed this point but highlighted that:

If we only talked, if we considered that our target corresponds to the people who are involved in the movement or very fond of radical left issues, it means that we only talk to a minority of people and that we make a mistake.

In line with the other experts that were interviewed, Marion Beauvalet suggested that there are two additional layers to the audience that LFI is trying to attract by politicising different insecurities. In her own words, this would mean “winning the people who don't vote anymore, and the people who could be interested in what Marine Le Pen says”.

More specifically, it seems that the party and its leader are using issues relating to traditional security themes, such as law and order and police violence, to attract members of the Yellow Vests movement and those affected by authoritarian policies.

As Martin Baloge argued:

I think they tried to reach young people, people who suffer - and I use the word ‘suffer’ on purpose...suffer from the relationship that some populations in France have with the police...I’m thinking of people living in the *banlieues*, for instance, or people coming from immigration backgrounds; people who suffer - and again, I use the word *suffer* - from the *contrôles aux faciès*, the police controls in the streets that are mostly focused on people with Arabic or African origin. So I think they are trying to reach those people, people in the *banlieues*, people coming from immigration backgrounds and people, of course, that are sensitive to this whole topic of police brutality and police abuse. And also, I should not forget people who suffer from the ways police deal with protests in France.

Finally, Mélenchon and LFI are interested in reaching the group that they labelled *fâchés mais pas fachos* (angry but not fascists). As Chloé Alexandre (Science Po Grenoble) explained, Mélenchon:

Famously said that he was trying to reach the ‘*fâchés pas fachos*’, as in the angry that tend to fade into abstention or to vote for the radical right to express discontent even though they do not share the values.

For Manuel Cervera-Marzal, the *fâchés mais pas fachos* are:

The workers, those that are voting for Le Pen and the Rassemblement National, but that are not voting for Le Pen because they are fascists or racists, but because they are socially and economically suffering from globalisation and so on. LFI thinks that its talk about security maybe can seduce or convince these people.

Laura Chazel similarly sees a connection between this group and the relevance of insecurity. She argued that integrating more discussions around contemporary insecurity is a way for LFI to reach out to these groups:

I think one of the reasons [for speaking security] is to speak to the *fâchés mais pas fachos*, to speak to two types of people: people who vote for the National Rally, but are not fascists, just angry. They are trying to build a popular block taking those people with them, so the working classes who are living in insecurity. And also people who don't vote, like from the Yellow Vests. I think it's those kinds of people they are trying to appeal to.

As we will see later in section 6.6.2, the dimension of competition with Le Pen is very important and all experts ended up speaking about it and relating to LFI's discussions around insecurity. However, among the three audiences of left-wing individuals, non-voters and the working class attracted by Le Pen, it is the latter group that LFI has so far failed to attract. Chloé Alexandre, who specialises in the demand side of populism, has studied LFI's electorate closely during the past elections and argued that:

Mélenchon failed to attract the '*fâchés pas fachos*'. Only people with left-wing values supported him, but he did manage to bring around first-time voters, and some people who usually abstain.

Overall it seems that the party has specific audiences in mind for its narratives on contemporary insecurity. To what extent these are successful in bringing voters to the ballot box is a different question for future research to answer.

6.6. Strategic aims

The discussion on target audiences is a first step to start understanding *why* LFI and Mélenchon engage with the politics of insecurity, that is, the framing of collective threats. Understanding what groups political actors target with their messaging is important not only to identify their audiences but also to unpack who they are trying to compete with and how they are trying to present themselves. The experts interviewed in this study suggested that Mélenchon's and LFI's engagement with the politics of insecurity may help achieve five strategic aims. These aims are discussed in the sections below and developed as hypotheses for future testing.

6.6.1. *Resignifying security*

When discussing activist circles, we earlier saw Vincent Dain mentioning that they believe the party should not co-opt the Right and “at least [...] try to find *another way* to talk about these topics” (emphasis added). This was common among experts as well, as some of them perceive LFI's talk on security as an attempt to expand what is traditionally understood as producing ‘insecurity’. As Manuel Cervera-Marzal put it:

When I hear them [on] security, I think they try to widen, to enlarge the concept of security, to say that security is not just the physical security of being safe in your house, but it's also: ‘can you have food for your children? Or social security?’.

However, this expansion is not a mere broadening, linguistic exercise. It aims at reappropriating a term that the PRR has monopolised, adapting it to the party's left-wing ideology. Laura Chazel argued that Podemos, a long-time inspiration for Mélenchon, embarked on a similar process in Spain:

What I saw with left-wing people and activists as well in Spain, [is that] progressive security would be two things. First of all, showing that insecurity is not just in the suburbs; they are trying to resignify the term 'security' to show that, for example, people who do not earn enough money, they are not safe; that the ecological crisis is putting people in insecurity situations. So there is this will to resignify the term as they did for the 'homeland'. [In that case], they tried to take a right-wing theme and to apply it to their ideology. They did the same in France and in Spain about nationalism, saying 'we are the real patriots because we don't have our bank accounts in Switzerland!'. They're doing the same thing with security, trying to show that security is not only about crime.

The process of resignification has several dimensions. First, it expands the domain of insecurity beyond crime. As the quotes above suggested, the party is trying to inject into everyday political discourse the idea that security does not only originate from physical safety but also from protection against economic distress or environmental threats, to name a few.

Second, the resignification of security shifts the position of those involved in the 'insecurity story'. As detailed in Chapter 5, this research has found that the main characters of the insecurity story are the people and the elites, respectively as the receivers and producers of insecurity. Migrants, who in the narrative of the PRR would be producers of insecurity as well, do not assume such a role in LFI's story. As Nicolas Hubé put it: "[Mèlenchon] is more criticizing the insecurity from the state rather than the threats to the people - which is the strategy of the conservatives". The idea of the 'insecurity from the state' was also articulated by Mélenchon himself in one of his blogs where he indeed called insecurity "the most unbearable form of abandonment by the state" (6 March 2018).

Third, the resignification allows them to embrace insecurity without 'losing the game' of speaking about more order without the perceived 'legitimacy' in doing so. This means that, instead of ignoring it, the party can acknowledge and discuss insecurity with no 'embarrassment' and make explicit links to the vision of society it aims to

achieve. This is exemplified in the discourse on migration that, although still ambiguously representing the phenomenon as ‘a problem’, links it to the structural conditions that migrants experience, and not migrants themselves (see Chapter 5, *Counternarratives*).

The resignification process is part of a broader effort to re-calibrate the predominance of Le Pen’s takes on security. According to Marion Beauvalet, the National Rally provides a “reactionary and dominant analysis of security issues” which makes their proposed measure appear as “logical conclusions”. She argued that:

If you say that there are too many immigrants in France, and that the Muslims create problems in the country, that you want the immigrants to go back to their country [...], this seems to be a very logical solution. But when we talk about our program, it's not the logical conclusion of the dominant analysis. [...] Our analyses are not dominant in the public and political, or the mediatic sphere. If a journalist on TV is just there to talk to you about a crime, for example, committed by a Muslim, you can't talk of the *police de proximité* [one of LFI's proposed measures]. If you do it, maybe it's far more important, but it doesn't answer the question. According to me, this is the problem: if you say to [Jordan] Bardella [the former vice president of RN; now president since November 2022] or Le Pen that someone who's not white attacked somebody in the city, they would say “okay, send them back to their country” and it will answer the question.

In sum, for PRL parties, resignifying security could mean dismantling the established narrative of insecurity as the result of crime and injecting a new understanding in public discourse. It could function as a strategic attempt to narrate insecurity to their publics as the product of structures and actors, most notably elites’ behaviours.

6.6.2. *Competing with Le Pen*

Vincent Dain told me that there is an important reflection within the party about how to address and win back ‘working class voters’ (see below). As Chloé Alexandre suggested, LFI’s electorate:

Is younger (students, first-time voters) while RN attracts more people who are in the middle of their career. Both electorates have few upper classes. But LFI's is more middle class while RN is more working class. LFI's electorate is clearly more urban and educated.

LFI is aware that working-class voters are more attracted by Le Pen's party and that is why Mélenchon has made it one of the party's goals to speak more to the group summarised in the expression *fâchés mais pas fachos*. According to Vincent Dain, the party is asking itself:

"What should we do more, to talk about these areas that are not voting for us, but that should because they are from [working class] backgrounds and we are supposed to defend the working class?". So they are having some reflection about that right now. For example, Ruffin says, "in my constituency, the urban area voted a lot for Mélenchon, but the former working-class neighbourhoods now vote for Marine Le Pen, so we have to address them".

Several experts mentioned that François Ruffin is one of the key advocates for finding new ways to appeal to these voters. For Laura Chazel:

Ruffin is one of the guys who's trying to say "We need to speak to the *fâchés mais pas fachos*", doing it way more than Mélenchon. Mélenchon says it but Ruffin is the one who's trying to take people from the far right and make them vote for [LFI]. He's the one who is not denying that people in suburbs where there is a lot of immigration, are living situations of hell sometimes, and he hopes to combine progressive discourse with this. [...] He had this article on *Liberation* after the election, he had this long interview on, "how do we speak to people who vote for the far right? it's because they are unsafe, because they don't have enough money".

As we have seen earlier in the section on Target Audience, there is a shared perception among LFI experts that the party mobilises issues of insecurity to attract Le Pen's potential voters. Chapter 5 has shown that in LFI's discourse, insecurity is broadly defined, and it is discursively related to social, economic, environmental and political issues. This helps the party address the variegated grievances and concerns that characterise the groups most negatively affected by globalisation and neoliberalism,

usually turning to the PRR. According to Paolo Chiocchetti, the attempt to compete and 'steal' from Le Pen is most evident in the party's protectionist agenda, labelled *protectionnisme solidaire*:

This is an idea which has a long history in the French radical left from the 70s. But right now, it has a little bit of a rhetorical twist and it's also used to show "look, Le Pen is saying that she's going to protect you, but then - economically - she's leaving you open to threats from the European Union or from multinational corporations".

For some of the experts, the approach to migration is also indicative of a pressure to compete with the National Rally. As discussed in Chapter 5, while migration is not portrayed as a threat to French people, the topic is still clearly articulated on the basis of an insecurity narrative centred on elites producing insecurity. In LFI's story, however, those affected by insecurity differ from Le Pen's discourse: it is the people alongside the migrants themselves. As Chiocchetti put it, Mélenchon tried:

[To] remain on the side of migrants but also criticise the causes that lead to migration, as a way to address the concerns of the people concerned about too much immigration, saying "okay, look, no: it's not a threat, but we have ways, we can address excessive migration by addressing the causes which lead people to migrate".

Similarly, Manuel Cervera-Marzal argued that:

When they speak about security, they're not saying "the migrants" or "the Muslims" are the problem. So it's more to say that there is a policy issue and the government didn't do what should be done.

For Paolo Chiocchetti, the pressure to compete with Le Pen's party is strong because of a precise underlying condition: it is not just the presence of a competing but ideologically opposed radical populist party, it is *the levels* of support Le Pen has achieved in the last decade. In Chiocchetti's own words: "without a very strong far-right party, probably Mélenchon would not have addressed these topics to this extent and

in these terms". In addition, for Chiocchetti, the *types* of insecurity being discussed add another level of complexity. In his understanding:

If we talk about issues that are traditionally connotated as right-wing issues, like migration and law and order, yes, there's this influence of Le Pen [on LFI] and in general on the mainstream discourse on terrorism, for example, and so on. They have to find a way to respond to that and to address these issues, at least at the rhetorical level. If you're talking about the [other] idea of security, [as] economic security, social security, ecological threats etc: these are their core themes, they will talk about them in any case and I'm not sure that the presence of Le Pen affects the way that they approach these issues.

This is a crucial analytical point that future research needs to unpack. While the general hypothesis is that the PRL may have an incentive in adopting insecurity narratives when competing with the PRR, research is necessary to understand *when* this may happen and for *what* insecurities more specifically.

6.6.3. *Competing with the Left*

There is an interesting strategic dimension that emerged from expert interviews. According to several academics, Mélenchon and LFI are not only trying to compete with Le Pen to attract voters suffering from insecurity. They are also using security as a discursive tool to distinguish themselves from other left-wing competitors. By incorporating a broadened set of security topics that does not co-opt the themes of the radical right, LFI is hoping to appear as the most viable option against the Socialists and the Communist Party, which, as we saw earlier, have increasingly taken up the approach of the right. In the context of the 2022 elections, according to Laura Chazel, "the Communist Party was tackling the topic of security a lot, was defending policemen a lot and I guess Mélenchon had to develop a counter-discourse".

Additionally, an open discussion about the sources and solutions to contemporary insecurity, combined with a critical but non-radical position on the role of the police, helps LFI set clear boundaries against more extreme actors on the left. Marion Beauvalet argued that:

Having a book about security, being very clear with it, knowing the main objectives, what we want to do for the police, and the relation we want between the police and the population...Being okay with this means being in opposition to the new NPA, New Anticapitalist Party, which is very anti-police and says that all cops are bastards.

Competing with other left-wing actors may be important to the party for two key reasons. First, together with the goal of attracting the angry and disillusioned citizens who may turn to Le Pen, competing with the left can be conceived as an additional sub-strategy that helps the party meet its wider goal of “speak[ing] to as many people as we can”, a goal that Marion Beauvalet confirmed is at the heart of the party’s strategy. Second, competing with the rest of the Left helped Mélenchon achieve his long-time goal of establishing a hegemony of the left. Since the times of his foundation of the *Parti de Gauche* (see Chapter 4), Mélenchon aimed to unite left-wing parties under a single flag and his own leadership. It was the failure to do so that actually led to the creation of LFI. The very existence of LFI has been characterised by a desire to become the sole viable option for a left party in government for those who no longer identify themselves with the Socialist Party. With the creation of the NUPES coalition (*Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologique et Sociale* - New Ecological and Social People’s Union) for the 2022 legislative elections, which revolved around LFI and proposed Mélenchon as the Prime Minister candidate, experts recognised that the goal of an hegemony of the left had been achieved.

The mobilisation of insecurity issues could be hypothesised to be a strategy for the PRL to set clear boundaries against the left ‘that is too right-wing’ and the left ‘that

is too left'. In addition, this can help PRL parties that desire to build an image as the 'sole' viable option for those left-wing voters who do not appreciate the accommodation of right-wing approaches.

This potential use of insecurity as strategic resource links to the next party's goal of building a governing profile, explored below.

6.6.4. Building a governing profile

The hypotheses we have discussed so far suggest that performing the politics of insecurity can help PRL actors reappropriate and resignify a term that the PRR has monopolised; it can also help them assume clear discursive and policy positions against other left-wing parties, as well as a competing radical populist party. In this subsection, we discuss how insecurity narratives may also support a party's quest in building a governing profile.

As Manuel Cervera-Marzal suggested:

The strategy [for LFI] is to present themselves as the wise [ones] that will protect the nation, that will represent law and order. Because Mélenchon is often represented by the media and his opponents as a troublemaker, a revolutionary, someone who will create instability in the country. So when he speaks about insecurity, I think it's to counter, to respond to these attacks, to show that he can be the one to bring order to the country.

Having interviewed over 100 party officials, especially those belonging to the 'first circle', closest to Mélenchon, he added:

Everything in LFI has been thought of in a way to gain the executive power. The strategy is implemented to obtain the presidential power. I think that's the priority for them. The money, the strategy on social media, the centrality of Jean-Luc Mélenchon: everything is for taking the presidential power.

Mélenchon's troubled relationship with the media is no secret (see also Chapter 4). This came up in expert interviews as well, as many mentioned that Mélenchon has historically struggled to shake the troublemaker image off himself. As some activists and local leaders of the party told Vincent Dain:

"The problem with Mélenchon is that he's an exceptional leader, but at the same time you never know when he's going to slip and to say something completely crazy on TV".

Martin Baloge suggested that Mélenchon:

Has this image of a very aggressive man, [and] it's quite difficult to go past this image. During the last campaign, he tried to soften a little bit. My opinion on that is that, during non-campaign periods, he is more aggressive, of course, [in order] to be put on the media agenda, yeah because you have to be quite... 'caricatural', sensational. Then of course during campaign periods... it's actually quite a handicap because during this short period of campaign, he has to change the whole image that he created during the long term, which is one of a conflictual politician, which is always problematic because, in France, when you vote for President you look at someone who's capable of gathering the whole nation.

There is probably an awareness inside the party that, besides convincing a broad sector of voters in terms of policies and ideas, there is also a need to build credibility. For some of the experts, addressing citizens' insecurity concerns - broadly defined - is a way to counter the perception that Mélenchon may not be 'presidential material'. Laura Chazel contended that the three democratic, social and environmental emergencies at the core of LFI's platform are a tool to do this:

They're always trying to show the real answer to those emergencies. [...] they're trying to show that they're the rational ones, because they have the answer to these tremendous emergencies, which the other political parties don't have.

Bringing the perspective from inside the party, Marion Beauvalet confirmed that there is an active effort in building the credibility and recognition of LFI:

For example, on the fight against sexual violence, on these kinds of subjects which are not the most complicated, we managed in some - I don't know -

five or six months, to change the perceptions that everybody had and we became the first party, the party which was the most appreciated by the associations of the sector.

She went on to argue that they are trying to do the same with security. First, she remarked that, of the thematic booklets they prepared to complement the 2022 election programme, “the longest was about security” and that “nobody, not even on the Right, writes these kinds of documents!”. She also added:

When we published the booklet about security, the chief of the ‘police column’ of the newspaper *Le Monde*, called us to say that we had the most serious programme, even if he didn’t agree with everything, he agreed with the analyses and some of the propositions. He told us that we had the only serious programme about the subject.

In sum, insecurity can help a party raise new issues or reframe older ones under a new, more emergential lens, while providing ad hoc solutions that are generally in line with its wider policy platform. This hypothesis goes hand in hand with the resignification hypothesis explored earlier: by reappropriating security and articulating it in conjunctions with left-wing values and principles, a PRL party can attempt to dismantle the more established and ‘reactionary’ analyses provided by the radical right. In doing so, PRL actors can start providing answers to contemporary insecurity that “follow logically” (to use Marion Beauvalet’s words) from the way the party itself interprets the phenomenon. Once again, we can observe how the advantages provided by the politics of insecurity are interconnected and cannot be considered as standalone strategies. This suggests that future research should test the hypotheses developed in this study looking at them in their totality.

6.6.5. Conflictualising, politicising and setting the agenda

A key theme that emerged from the interviews when I asked experts about what may be the goal of LFI when discussing insecurity, is the critique and opposition to 'the establishment', as a way to set items on the public agenda.

The starting point to understanding this potential strategy is comprehending the use and significance of 'conflict' within the party. As Vincent Dain put it, if the party strategy could be summarised into a single word, this would be 'conflictualisation'. In Dain's own words,

Conflictualising everything. [This] applies very well to describe the communication strategy of the party which always aims at trying to create conflict, to attract the attention on a subject by conflictualising it. Especially like when Mélenchon said during the legislative campaign, "The police kills": this was a very clear strategy, like "we have to conflictualise this topic so that people talk about it, and then we are going to set up the agenda".

The conflictualisation strategy seems to display two dimensions. First, it may help the party to politicise new issues and set the agenda. As Vincent Dain suggested:

Now they're always trying to politicise every affair in every moment; every time there is a case of police brutality, they are talking about it and trying to politicise it, to say that there is a huge need to reform the police and to change everything, all the way to the top.

As we have seen so far in this research, the policy issues that are dearest to the party and its leader have predominantly been at the centre of the 'insecurity stories' discussed across their media platforms. Insecurity works as an ideational tool that helps LFI potentially increase the salience of those issues among the public, with the effect of further politicising them. Moreover, the conflictualisation strategy is intimately tied with the politics of insecurity because it helps the party portray the elites as enemies of the people. As we have seen throughout the earlier chapter (see Chapter 5), Mélenchon and his party establish a clear relationship of insecurity when mobilising

a variety of topics, narrating the elites as the malevolent and conscious producers of the insecurity encompassing contemporary societies.

However, elites are a simplification, a concept that helps populist actors distil in a single word and represent a wider 'system' that fails the people. Chiocchetti interestingly remarked that, in Mélenchon's and LFI's discourse, those who represent the system are often overlapping:

[They criticise] a lot of structures and actors which somehow overlap depending on what they're talking about and what the mood of Mélenchon is...sometimes he talks about the people against the elite, sometimes he talks about humanity against capitalism, sometimes he talks about French citizens against the political elite and Emmanuel Macron. But somehow he sees all these different levels of analysis as overlapping, in the sense that the underlying theory is that contemporary capitalism leads to a concentration of wealth and power in an economic oligarchy - that's the term that he uses. This oligarchy does not only have economic power, but also has an enormous political influence; what rulers and politicians of mainstream political parties are doing is to serve the interest of this elite, directly or indirectly. When they criticise Macron, they criticise him because he is the figure representing the interest of the elites.

This suggests that Mélenchon and LFI use 'the elites' as a conceptual container to signify a more complex system and that system can be exemplified in slightly different ways. What is crucial, as Marion Beauvalet confirmed, is that there is a *strategic* decision in LFI to conflictualise 'elites', as a proxy for the wider 'system'. When I asked her why the party blames 'actors' more than 'structures' when articulating insecurity to the public (as per my research findings), she responded that:

I think that if we make some complex analyses...For example, during your first question, I was talking about neoliberalism, the structures and the fact that some actors couldn't act on some subject and it was a consequence of the structure...during a conference, we can explain [things like] this but **when we talk about these topics in the everyday life, we have to build a cleavage. And Macron stands for neoliberalism**, for us it is clear that he is the kind of...the crowning achievement of the system. He embodies the economic elite, he studied at Science Po and at this big School of Administration. He is part of the socio-economic elite, he worked for

Rothschild; he was not part but very close to some people in the Socialist Party. When he wanted to run for president, business people gave him a lot, a lot [emphasises] of money to finance his campaign. Since he's president, there have been many conflicts of interest between the people he chose in administration or for special responsibilities and the jobs they had in some firms. So I think he is the crowning achievement of something very 'liberal' - but in the way it is understood in French. [...] So this is the structure, [this is what] we have in our mind, and when we talk of Macron, it's not about the individual - who may be a very nice man, I don't know - but it's the system which he embodies. [...] Maybe it's linked to the populist strategy, I don't know, but **when you say 'Macron' to people, it will make them angrier than if you say 'neoliberalism'**. (emphasis added)

For Beauvalet (and for the party), this is important because 'everyday life' requires simplified and less complex analyses. To deliver these, LFI summarises the 'big' concepts such as neoliberalism, by personalising them into the figure of Macron. This was reflected in the findings explored in Chapter 5, which saw Macron consistently ranking first as the 'source' of insecurity within a variety of narratives.

Nicolas Hubé added an additional remark to this level of analysis, by arguing that LFI and Mélenchon do not simply criticise the system; they actually oppose the whole way the system understands and deals with 'security'. For him, this is first and foremost "a critique of security". Echoing this point, Chiocchetti argued that Mélenchon:

Has a discourse about security, but in terms of criticising excesses or errors in securitarian policies. Also on terrorism: he talks openly about it, showing, for example, that the current policies of the French government or capitalism more in general, lead to insecurity and to terrorism. This is the kind of main reasoning.

Martin Baloge further exemplified this point by referring to the party's position on the police. He argued that LFI is critical of the *entire* way the police works in France, and considers policemen 'victims' of the system themselves, adding:

This allows me to answer your question. Who's in charge of the system? Of course, you have the Interior Minister, and a key figure in France related to the Yellow Vests movement, is the prefect of Paris. So those would be the two main figures. Of course, during campaigns, Emmanuel Macron... he's in charge of those two.

The idea of opposing the way the system generally frames ‘security’ reconnects to the party’s key hypothetical aims explored throughout these subsections. By seeking to disrupt the dominant understanding of security, Mélenchon and LFI have embarked on a process of resignification that helps them reframe the public debate on security. In doing so, they may hope to, first, change the perception that insecurity can affect citizens only through physical exposure to crime, and second, to actually link it to the themes that the party owns. Reframing insecurity also means LFI can make itself strategically relevant when competing with both Le Pen and the rest of the left. As Baloge argued, LFI has a:

Unique way of dealing with security, which makes it strategically relevant. If you're the only one to propose alternative public policies to look at security and the police, of course, you will distinguish yourself from your opponents.

Overall the hypothesis emerging from this section is that opposing the way the system understands security may provide PRL parties with a strategic advantage, as they can attempt to portray themselves as the creator of order rather than chaos. More generally, they may use their opposition to the system’s take on insecurity as a tool to criticise the system itself. In other words, by establishing relationships of insecurity that narrate the elites as a source of danger for the people, PRL parties can *reinforce* their critique of the system and hope to set the agenda by politicising different issues.

6.7. The role of ideas

As set out in the Introduction to this chapter, one of the key aims of the present discussion is to understand the role of ideas in the construction and articulation of insecurity, alongside more strategic considerations. In particular, this section

investigates how ideas relating to the party's combination of populist and radical left ideologies are integrated into insecurity narratives. First of all, I asked interview respondents whether they thought the discussion of insecurity was predominantly a strategic enterprise. There was a general agreement among experts that, although strategic considerations play a role (for all the reasons explored in the earlier section on Strategic Aims), the role of ideas should not be underestimated. In particular, all experts argued that, although 'security' may not represent a 'key pillar' of LFI's ideology - as it is for other actors on the Right -, the party genuinely believes in a range of insecurities that affect citizens in contemporary societies and wishes to tackle them.

For instance, Manuel Cervera-Marzal told me:

I think it's a strategy but it's also their vision of the world. **I had more than 100 interviews with members of LFI and most of them think that the world is insecure, because of the wars, because of climate change, because of the economic crisis, because of political instability.** So yes, most of them, of course not all but most of them, feel insecure and this is part of their vision, not only a strategic consideration. (emphasis added)

Similarly, for Laura Chazel:

If we speak about ecological insecurity, or social insecurity: this is part of [LFI's] vision of the world, they're not adapting it. [...] Mélenchon was already speaking about this, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, without using the word directly but still speaking about security. [...] Concerning these two insecurities is clearly not only strategy, because, for example, with ecological insecurity...they were speaking about it before it was fashionable. There was a time when nobody was talking about stuff like that. People speaking about stopping nuclear energy were considered marginal people and he was always talking about this.

Hence for Chazel, the fact that Mélenchon has been vocal about different forms of insecurity throughout the years suggests that this was not simply a strategic attempt to 'exploit' contemporary uncertainties. Vincent Dain echoed this point by adding:

I think it's also part of their vision of the world both if we talk about social and economic insecurity, because in their **political DNA** there is this idea that "we are the heirs of the social security system", that "we have to provide every human being with the sufficient amount of money to survive, to live". There was a phrase, an expression from Mélenchon at the end of the debate

in 2017, “*qui viennent les jours heureux et le goût du bonheur*” [which refers to] the possibility for everyone to be happy, to give the material conditions to everyone to have a happy life. So, from this point of view, yes: there is a strong ideological component. (emphasis added)

As experts generally agreed that addressing the causes of citizens’ insecurity is part of Mélenchon’s and LFI’s vision of the world, I went on to ask them what ideational resources, more specifically, drive this vision and understanding of contemporary insecurity. In a nutshell, while some pinpointed populist ideas as the basis of the conflict that the party identifies between those who cause and those who are affected by insecurity, most experts believe that left-wing ideas play an important role. For Vincent Dain:

Populism plays a part when they are talking about the fact that the oligarchy is creating disorder and the working class and the people is going to mobilise to create the conditions for everyone to be in social and economic security. So the populist stand is present in it, of course. [...] During the Yellow Vests movement [...] there was this idea that the people were brutalised by the oligarchy. **Macron was personalising the whole oligarchy** during the Yellow Vests movement, whether they are political, financial or economic elites. And I think that, at that time, they had a very populist framing of “the people being struck by the state and by the oligarchy”. (emphasis added)

Populist ideas are crucial for the party to frame insecurity as a product of malevolent behaviour on the part of the elites. In a certain sense, populism lays the foundations for the conflictualisation strategy seen earlier, because it is the struggle people/elite that structures the identification of those who produce insecurity and those who are affected by it. For Dain, this is particularly evident in Mélenchon’s idea of ‘popular environmentalism’ (i.e., environmentalism for the people/the masses), which “oppose[s] those from the bottom, who are the victims of the climate crisis, to the top, the oligarchy, that is responsible for the climate crisis”.

Manuel Cervera-Marzal provided an alternative interpretation of the link between insecurity and populism in LFI. He argued that:

They consider that we are living in what they call a 'populist moment', the revolt of the people against the elite. [...] They consider this populist moment a moment of crisis of liberal democracy. This crisis is good news because it means that some alternative politics is possible, but it's also bad news and a danger because it's a crisis and there is a possibility for fascism to come back.

In this view, populist ideas do not simply help make sense of who produces and who suffers insecurity. The populism moment, intended as "the revolt of the people against the elites" is in itself a form of insecurity, because it is a moment of crisis and conflict between different visions of how society should work. Hence, as a populist party engaged in that very revolt, LFI views and experiences the world as insecure.

The left-wing ideology, however, also provides additional key content to articulate insecurity. According to Martin Baloge, the ideas of equality and liberty, at the core of Mélenchon's and LFI's ideology, are key resources that intertwine with insecurity. In the scholar's interpretation:

The core ideology of LFI is the idea that, **if you have equality, you will have security**. [...] You reach security if you reach an equalitarian way of dealing with security, [an equalitarian] relation between the police and the citizens. If you reach economic equality, if you reach environmental equality, you will reach security for the whole society and not only [on] the 'order' or 'police' dimensions. [...] If you manage - in Mélenchon's and LFI's opinion - to limit inequality, to limit too much liberty from the police, you will reach security and safety for the citizens [...]. **I think that's the core idea really, that you can change security, if you change inequalities between citizens.** (emphasis added)

While populism helps structure what insecurity *is* and *how it comes about* - that is, as a consequence of elites' deliberate behaviour -, left-wing ideas are fundamental to articulating the vision of how insecurities *should be addressed*. According to Marion

Beauvalet, the way LFI would act on contemporary insecurity summarises a left-wing general vision of society. She argued that:

With our vision of security, the society would be different, it would be a society where we try to solve the roots of the problems and have programs against poverty, unemployment, etc. instead of just stigmatising Muslims or immigrants.

Overall populist ideas may inform the identification of the characters within the story and help articulate contemporary insecurity as a relational process that sees elites as (directly or indirectly) endangering the people. This is complemented by left-wing ideas, which inform how the resolution to that insecurity should come about, based on certain answers and following an agenda focusing on social justice, public services and an inclusive society.

6.8. Who drives the communication strategy?

Before concluding this chapter, this section provides a clarification on the role that Mélenchon plays in deciding and driving the communication strategy of the party. Experts agree that LFI is not a 'democratic' party, as Mélenchon has founded and strictly managed the life of the party with no internal democracy provisions. As Laura Chazel put it, "it's very well known that there is a really non-democratic organisation in LFI, there is no question about this". Hence academics suggested that the leader has a predominant role in identifying the party's direction. Moreover, as Paolo Chiocchetti explained, the incorporation of ideas in the party's ideology is very dependent on Mélenchon's own "eclectic" thinking. Chiocchetti underlined that:

Every now and then, he finds ideas which are interesting and adopts them, either new stuff or he reframes what he thought before in a different way; he draws in a lot of new kinds of ways of framing questions and content. For example, in his books, he said "I was a Marxist and then I listened to this

and that, and I realized that ecology is very important, so let's bring in ecology". Then "I went to Latin America and understood that populism could be a good way to frame stuff". He has strange ideas, for example, he comes in and talks about the importance of the sea and how we can create energy. Ideas, which are unrelated to a normal left-winger, but maybe he read them somewhere, maybe saw them somewhere, and he thought that's an original idea. Then he said, "I went there and I learned from the Bolivian president about the importance of indigenous people" and he puts them in [the programme]. This is the way that he develops the ideas, eclectically somehow, starting from different traditions - Socialist, Republican, ecological - and then new influences come in and he frames them in a very French way, particular to him.

Although LFI is not a personal party, the leader is crucial in shaping its ideas and battles. However, according to Martin Baloge, this is also just a by-product of the French political system:

When you say "they", you mostly have to think "him" because...and it's not specific to LFI...when you think about parties in France, you have to think about the leader of the party, especially if you're thinking about communication. In France, parties are incarnated by their leaders. [...] So yeah, I'm not sure that everything is driven by him [...] but the goal in the end is *to focus on him*, that's for sure. (emphasis added)

Overall, Mélenchon's position as the founder of the party, his role in developing and articulating the party's ideology, and the prominence that the political system assigns to leaders, all converge in suggesting that - one way or the other - he is front and centre of the communication strategy. However, experts also acknowledged that Mélenchon works with "internal experts of communication and also external agencies" (Paolo Chiocchetti). The first group is represented by a close circle of young politicians "who master, in every aspect, social media and digital activism" (Martin Baloge). The second group probably refers to the communication agency led by a certain Sophia Chirikou.

Vincent Dain explained that:

Sophia Chikirou has a very important role, I think she is at the head of the communication agency working on Mélenchon's campaigns. Later they internalised it, but before there was this communication agency. I think she is

one of those who theorise the idea of conflictualising everything, and she has an influence, she is Mélenchon's girlfriend.

Overall, the picture emerging from this section of the expert interviews suggests that Mélenchon plays a crucial role in driving the communication strategy and any ideological development in the party, although he surrounds himself of communication specialists who master social media dynamics and help the party disseminate the key messages. As Manuel Cervera-Marzal summarised it:

[Mélenchon] has a small team; when I say a small team, I mean 5 or 10 people that are working with him. Most of them are young politicians, 30-35 years [old]. So the young are being recruited by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, they are being [trained] by Mélenchon. And when he has to take an important decision, he speaks to them, and listens to their advice and opinions. **But in the end, he decides alone.** I didn't meet Mélenchon himself, but I met these people that I'm talking about. They call themselves the "first circle" around Mélenchon and **they explained that themselves.** (emphasis added)

Finally, Nicolas Hubé pointed out that the emergence of certain topics can, at times, be a strategic choice to please and/or appeal to specific target audiences. According to the scholar, this was particularly evident in the 2022 legislative campaign, when LFI led a coalition of left-wing and radical left parties for the first time, after refusing all alliances in the past. According to Hubé, this influenced what the party decided to prioritise at time. He explained that:

The themes are also popping up because of this fuzzy movement of strong activists. [...] [For] example, during the legislative campaign at [some] point, something popped up about Julian Assange and there was no rational reason why [Mélenchon decided to] discuss Julian Assange, it wasn't a big issue at stake. But we have to understand that probably, that came from some of the activists coming from the Pirate Party who were included in the legislative campaign and so he had to give them some 'pieces'.

These insights help us understand three key features of the party's communication that help us better contextualise and understand this research's findings. First, Mélenchon

is behind the ideological development of the party and also establishes the direction to follow, in terms of what themes get to be prioritised. Second, the 'first circle' of young party leaders plays an important role especially when it comes to adapting the communication strategy to new channels, such as social media. Finally, the decision of what topics get the spotlight is not only determined by the leader's own vision but also is also informed by a strategy to appeal to key activists and keep them mobilised.

6.9. Summary

This chapter has laid the ground to start understanding why Mélechon and LFI may engage with the politics of insecurity, generating a set of informed hypotheses for future research.

First of all, there may be a set of strategic reasons: the politics of insecurity may provide key advantages for a party in terms of helping a) resignify and reappropriate security from the ownership of the radical right, b) compete with the PRR to attract the working class who suffers insecurity the most but does not share the PRR's nativist agenda, c) distinguish itself and compete with other left parties, d) build credibility as a governing actor capable of addressing complex issues, and finally e) conflictualise the system as a producer of insecurity to politicise alternative approaches and set the agenda.

However, there may also be an ideological reason: the combination of populist and radical left ideas means that PRL parties see insecurity as a product of the unfair and harmful contemporary system, which they hope to radically change. Because of their populist ideas, they conceive elites, the oligarchy and the 'system' to be a threat to the people, and believe that restoring popular sovereignty in all aspects concerning

citizens' existence will restore security. The need for a radical change is also informed by their left-wing ideas which help them further articulate how that society will look like and will thrive following the principles of equality and social justice.

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a rationale for future studies to explore the ideational and strategic reasons to perform the politics of insecurity. The analysis here has helped us unpack the agency of populist parties and leaders in guiding the deconstruction of information and the creation of meaning, with a specific look at the role of strategies and ideas.

In the next, concluding chapter, we will bring together this research's key findings and discuss them in relation to the available scholarship, to highlight the thesis' overall contributions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

This thesis has challenged some existing assumptions on the relationship between the politics of insecurity and the populist radical left (PRL). It started off by arguing that the academic literature has often overlooked this relationship, building on a traditionalist understanding of security that essentialises the latter into 'law and order'. With security seen in this (restrictive) way, the populist radical right becomes the most obvious empirical case that comes to mind to examine the relationship between populism and security, given that this variety of populism has been shown to 'own' themes relating to law and order. Meanwhile, the socio-economic focus typical of the populist radical left is considered as having nothing to do with 'security'.

This approach, however, is limiting and does not allow us to understand an increasingly complex world dominated by multifaceted phenomena that *may or may not be* related to security, hence requiring elite interpretation to become intelligible. In other words, in a world in which 'crime' is not the only 'security concern', how can we better understand the contributions of different populist parties and leaders to the debate over the definition of what forms of insecurity require the state's attention?

Hence this project has challenged these limiting assumptions by borrowing from a constructivist understanding of security, an approach usually found within the tradition of International Relations studies. It has proposed a broad framework to conceptualise security as the result of a framing process that centres not only on discourses of threats but also on uncertainty, the need for protection and the spillover of insecurity. It has also theorised that these frames help construct 'relationships of

insecurity', meaning that they provide an interpretation of the issue at hand as an inimical dynamic in which X is portrayed as a source of existential insecurity for Y.

This chapter concludes the present research by bringing together the key findings and discussing them in relation to the available scholarship. Its main aim is to highlight how the thesis contributes to challenging and broadening existing knowledge. The chapter is structured as follows.

The **following section** summarises the findings originating from the Content Analysis Study (Chapter 5) and from Elite Interviews (Chapter 6), highlighting in what ways the empirical data has helped answer this study's main research questions.

The **third section** details the thesis' three-fold argument that posits that the politics of insecurity is a tool for identity construction rather than an exclusive tool of or a synonym for the radical right.

In the **fourth section**, the chapter explores some alternative explanations dictated by the specificities of the French context. As the research was based on a case study, it is argued that additional, context-dependent factors need to be considered as part of a reflective exercise.

Section five links the research findings to the existing literature, pointing out where this research expands or challenges available theories. It delves into the four contributions that this project delivers to the academic literature. The first contribution is developed by demonstrating that insecurity is a key ideational resource that different populists can use to articulate the struggle 'people vs. elite', and hence by proposing an important hypothesis for testing to what extent insecurity can be considered a core concept in the populist ideological structure. The second contribution is developed by providing an extensive account of how the *populist* features and *left* positioning of Mélenchon and LFI come together to shape their narratives on the state of insecurity

in contemporary societies, hence broadening our understanding of the populist radical left and ensuring an accumulation of knowledge on a case that has been comparatively less studied than its radical right counterpart in Europe. The third contribution is developed by problematising how other populist actors beyond the ‘usual suspects’ of the populist radical right talk about security with their public, hence unpacking the agency of populist actors in interpreting social reality and guiding processes of sense-making. The last contribution is developed by bringing populism studies in conversation with other research traditions most notably in the field of security studies and political psychology, hence adding to the cross-fertilisation between disciplines that is of vital importance to understanding complex real-world phenomena such as populism.

Finally, before concluding, **section six** discusses three key limitations of the research: the subjectivity of the researcher, the case study setting and the strict focus on language. It then moves on to highlight three main research directions that can originate from this work, namely a) future studies on the supply side of the populist politics of insecurity, b) additional research on the demand side and audience perceptions of insecurity narratives, and finally c) new original analyses on the performance of the politics of insecurity beyond language, for instance, via visual social media.

7.2. Research Findings: A Summary

This research aimed to answer three key research questions and as shown in the previous empirical chapters, the findings largely align with the starting point and expectations of the thesis.

RQ1: How do political parties and leaders espousing radical left populism interpret and communicate (ie. *frame*) (in)security in their external communication?

- RQ1.1: Are their (in)security narratives predominantly shaped by populist ideas or their radical left ideology?

RQ2: Why does the populist radical left engage with the politics of insecurity (if this is widely associated with their - often loathed - radical right competitor)? Is it a matter of ideas or strategy?

RQ1 and the corollary RQ1.1 were tackled via a Content Analysis study looking at the case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and LFI and detailed in Chapter 5, which provided a complex and multifaceted answer to the research question. This answer can be broken down into **three key points**.

The **first point** concerns the *structure* of insecurity narratives. Looking at the structure meant looking at the key elements that help construct the overall story about insecurity. This entailed first looking at the frames that were most frequently used, and then assessing what actors and factors were portrayed as producers and receivers of insecurity. The examination revealed that Mélenchon's and LFI's insecurity narratives made predominant use of the 'threat' and 'security by association' language. This means they tend to communicate insecurity by labelling a number of key actors and phenomena as threats; in addition, they also communicate insecurity by associating certain actors and phenomena with security issues, hence transferring or 'spilling over' insecurity from one theme to the other. The examination of the elements making up Mélenchon's and LFI's insecurity narratives also revealed that the main producers of insecurity were identified to be 'the elites', whereas the receivers of insecurity were most often 'the people'.

The **second point** concerns the *content* of insecurity narratives. A qualitative analysis of the content of Mélenchon's and LFI's insecurity narratives pointed out that there seem to be three key stories that the party and its leader are keen to elaborate

on for the public. The first story is a story of insecurity everywhere, threatening every aspect of the everyday life of ordinary French citizens. The second story is a story of interconnection, whereby Mélenchon and LFI link all insecurities threatening the French, by presenting them as the multifaceted face of the same coin. The third story is a story of blame, which identifies the elites and the intentional or unintentional drivers of insecurity in France.

The **third point** concerns the comparison with the populist radical right and the mainstream left. The analysis of insecurity communication within Rassemblement National (RN) and Parti Socialiste (PS) in 2020, revealed that similarly to Mélenchon and LFI, RN identified insecurity in the relationship between the people and the elite, with the addition of some 'dangerous others'. Indeed, Mélenchon and LFI maintained a focus on 'us vs them' throughout 2020 too, despite a number of other events that could have been framed as sources of danger, most notably a global pandemic. While for populists, insecurity was personalised into their typical enemies (the establishment, and the immigrants/Muslims specifically for RN), this dynamic was absent from the communication of PS. On the contrary, PS identified as sources of insecurity in 2020 the Covid-19 crisis and climate change. To put it differently, insecurity for the PRL and PRR was re-elaborated in relation to the struggle people/elite, building a relationship of insecurity characterised by populism (plus nativism, in RN's case); this means that despite new threats emerging (i.e., the pandemic), these were not identified as such but immediately traced back to the failures of the establishment.

Overall the content analysis study shed light on the politics of insecurity as performed in the case of a PRL party and leader, detailing how they framed insecurity, who they identified as producers and recipients of insecurity and how these elements were all brought together to tell a wider story.

Moving on to RQ2, this was tackled via an Expert Interviews study, which explored the role of strategies and ideas in explaining why Mélenchon and LFI would engage with insecurity narratives. In terms of **strategies**, the study highlighted five potential strategic aims linked to the politics of insecurity which emerged from discussions with experts with close links to the party, and proposed them as hypotheses to test in future research. It was argued that the politics of insecurity could help LFI resignify security to the party's own advantage, in a context in which these narratives are dominated by radical right rhetoric. Especially in those cases in which populist parties co-exist within the same political system, as in the case of LFI and RN, defining what constitutes insecurity so as to offer the reassurance of 'protection' can mean speaking to audiences that are to some degree overlapping. The politics of insecurity can thus become an instrument for populists competing against each other. As Chapter 6 showed, however, insecurity narratives may also help a PRL party compete with other actors in the left-wing space, especially those who are perceived as having co-opted the discourse of the right as in the French case. New parties such as LFI may also strategically engage with discourses of insecurity as a way to build credibility as a governing actor, given the crucial importance that the topic of security has in the mind of voters. Finally, it was discussed how the politics of insecurity can become an instrument to criticise the establishment for failing to provide security, hence using the importance of the topic to increase salience. This can allow a party to politicise new issues and hence set the agenda.

In terms of **ideas**, the expert interviews study suggested that populist and leftist ideas permeate and shape Mélenchon's and LFI's insecurity narratives, however populism is a central ideational resource in this process. This is because their articulation of contemporary security revolves around a clear arrangement of the

subject-object relation: the people are victims of everyday insecurity and the elites are directly or indirectly dangerous. This showed that, at the core of Mélenchon's and LFI's security imaginary, is a relationship of insecurity built between the people vs the elite. To put it differently, insecurity emerged as the principle that demarcates the division people/elite.

The following section discusses how the research findings summarised here link to the existing literature and how they can extend our knowledge of populism, detailing the central argument proposed in this thesis.

7.3. Thesis' argument

Based on the empirical evidence explored in earlier chapters and summarised above, this section advances a threefold argument that is detailed in the subsections below. In articulating it, the sections also discuss how the argument relates to wider debates in the literature, pointing out where it builds on or challenges existing theories.

7.3.1. Insecurity as a tool for identity construction

The first part of this thesis' argument is that insecurity is an ideational tool that populists can use to construct the identity of the people. As de la Torre (2016, 134) argued, populist discourse is "effective in creating identities that were used to confront the power of elites". The present thesis is showing that these identities can be created using relationships of insecurity, that is, by positing the people as in danger while portraying the elites as the (direct or indirect) producer of that insecurity. The identity of the people is constructed as that of an 'insecure people' and the sharing of such

grievances is particularly emphasised. The insecurity of the people can sit alongside other markers of collectivity usually found in populist discourse, such as references to 'the many', 'the 99%' or simply 'us'. However, insecurity gives *essence* to this collective: it determines *what* makes the group a whole. The insecurity condition transcends nationality, ethnic origins, ideology or any other criteria of belonging and rather groups together individuals based on their own *perceptions* of threat.

In this sense, the construction of the insecure people links to the homogeneity thesis advanced by the ideational approach to populism, which is often criticised by the discourse school as paradoxical or contradictory (Katsambekis 2021). More specifically, the discourse school argues that populists take into account and aim to represent the grievances of different sectors of the population and this is directly countering the idea that those sectors are homogenous, as maintained by scholars of the ideational approach. The present thesis contributes to and extends these debates by arguing that, although acknowledging social heterogeneity and differences across groups, populists use the sense of 'togetherness' generated by the insecurity experience as an ideational tool to construct a *sense* of homogeneity. In other words, it is not the absence of material differences among groups that determines their homogeneity but their shared experience of insecurity at the hands of elites. However, this is different from the chain of equivalence argument advanced by Laclauian-inspired scholars, because it emphasises the role of perception and subjectivity rather than *material* 'unmet demands'.

Insecurity is a particular and special tool for the construction of identity. It functions as a constitutive and shared principle that groups together those who live and experience insecurity. As this thesis has shown, the politics of insecurity is a discursive mechanism that can allow different varieties of populist actors to glue

together the in-group. In this sense, the politics of insecurity is essential to populism, regardless of host ideology, because it simply underpins the people/elite struggle. Populists argue that the people's economic grievances, societal sense of dismay, political sense of loss would not exist without the elite creating this insecurity. This invocation of in-group belonging can be particularly effective in the context of advanced post-industrial societies where the cultural and economic changes of the last decades have brought a perception of widespread insecurity, whether material or perceived. This part of the argument effectively links to existing studies that have documented how perceptual accounts can often explain populist support more than material conditions of deprivation (e.g., Filsinger 2022; Steenvoorden and Harteveld 2018; Mols and Jetten 2016).

The thesis has shown how populists strive to nurture this sense of insecurity and make it real by building stories that attempt to make sense of the complex trajectories of contemporary insecurity and that attribute to the people the clear role of 'victims' in this 'tragedy'. Moreover, this construction is powerful because the 'insecure' identity is determined in direct opposition to those who have caused that insecurity in the first place. Kinnvall (2014) has argued that enemies are key ingredients in the making of the 'imagined communities' of populism, the so-called heartlands (Taggart 2000). This thesis has shown that the politics of insecurity is the *discursive mechanism* that makes it possible. In doing so, the thesis argues that the logic behind the struggle between the people vs. the elites in populist politics is not "we are the virtuous people and they are the corrupt elite", but rather "we are the insecure people and they are those who made us so".

Insecurity is a peculiar tool of identity construction because it does not simply bring a diverse group together, and posits it against a shared source of danger; it also

requires an external intervention for security to be restored. In other words, constructing the 'insecure people' entails that an offer of protection is provided. That is where the populist party and leader come into play to provide *salvation* (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008), with the latter often portrayed as a 'superhero' (Schneiker 2020). Indeed, as Taggart (2000, 1) has argued, populism "requires the most extraordinary individuals to lead the most ordinary of people". Populists overall link their discourses of insecurity to their policy platform by arguing that they are implementing the general will of the people. Seen in this light, the will of the people is nothing more than a request to restore security.

In summary, insecurity appears to be an ideational tool that can help populists across the spectrum discursively construct the identity of the people as an 'insecure people', whose in-group boundaries are delineated against the elite-enemy who is said to be entirely responsible (either directly or indirectly) for that insecurity.

7.3.2. Insecurity is not an exclusive tool of the radical right

The second part of the thesis' argument is that intertwining the people and the elite with narratives of threat and insecurity is not an exclusive feature of the radical right but can be found in radical left populism as well. Looking at the 'less likely' scenario of the PRL meant following the assumptions often made in the literature that security is the domain of the right, and that the left (no matter if populist, radical or mainstream) is uncomfortable with the topic or the language that accompanies it. However, finding consistent evidence of an engagement with the politics of insecurity throughout the years for Mélenchon and LFI has helped counter and recognise this as an incorrect

assumption. In other words, finding confirmatory evidence in a less likely scenario means that continuing to rely on these assumptions is analytically restrictive.

The implication of this 'discovery' is that we are better equipped to tackle populism conceptually, given its notoriously slippery nature (Taggart 2000). This is important because, although scholars agree more than in the past that populism is a set of ideas about the relationship between the people and the elite (Rooduijn 2019, 363), there is still a lot of conflation with additional concepts, such as nativism and nationalism. When this happens, we attribute to populism explanations that could be traced back to other concepts. As Rooduijn (ibid.) argues, for instance, some academics link low education and populist voting when studying *radical right* populists, however their findings are not necessarily generalisable as it is more likely that nativism plays a role more than populism; indeed, research on education levels and populist radical left voting points to this more nuanced conclusion.

That said, just as we may reach incorrect conclusions by conflating populism with other concepts, we may also develop invalid theories by wrongfully attributing features to some populists as opposed to others. This is where the present research contributes. By using security as a tool to distinguish between populists, we overlook two important considerations.

First, we overlook left populists on a crucial task in contemporary societies, which is the definition and interpretation of risks in the modern world. Security is not simply a domain that is 'owned' by the radical right, especially not if it is intended in a constructivist way. It is rather an arena for the circulation of ideas about the interpretation of complex societal dynamics where political actors compete to define: What is a danger and what is not? What actions are required to address insecurity? Who/what groups in society are most affected? Political actors, including the PRL, take

part in a contest in this marketplace of security ideas, contributing to the debate with novel interpretations. In some cases, they can attempt to push interpretations that propose a rupture with ideas that have become hegemonic. We have seen this with Mélenchon and LFI putting forward counternarratives (see Section 5.6.2, Chapter 5) that attempt to dismantle their opponents' interpretations of certain insecurities, by shifting the identification of threats along the logic "A is not a danger, B is!". In doing so, populists engage in a framing contest for the (re)definition of security that aims at producing 'hierarchies' of what should be considered the 'top worry' in citizens' minds and whose security 'matters'. This contest also proposes different, sometimes conflicting solutions for how security should be achieved. Examining who/what the PRL identifies as major sources of threat, who/what they see as being affected by such dangers and the recipes they suggest to achieve security provides a more nuanced and granular understanding of what security means for populists. In addition, by assessing the PRL's understanding alongside the narratives of the PRR, we can add to our understanding of the relevance of insecurity in populist communication more generally.

Second, when using security as a tool to distinguish between populists, we fail to consider to what extent insecurity may define the relationship between the people and the elite more than the 'purity/virtue vs evil' dichotomy. My research has shown that elite illegitimacy and immorality are grounded on insecurity: based on the populist narrative, the elites should not govern and are immoral because they knowingly put the people in danger. Importantly, this research showed that the use of insecurity narratives is not a prerogative of the radical right but can be found in the PRL as well. This suggests that populism may be built on a 'premise of insecurity', that is, on the idea that the people are inherently at risk and those dangers are caused by the elites.

7.3.3. *The politics of insecurity and the radical right are not synonyms*

Finally, the third part of this thesis' argument is that the politics of insecurity should not be judged normatively as a synonym for opportunistic rhetoric; it should be empirically investigated with the aim to understand the plurality of ways in which insecurity can be interpreted and communicated to the public by leading political actors. This is important because biases against discourses on insecurity shape the contours of public debate on the topic. When the discourse on insecurity is considered opportunist or fearmongering, most commentators struggle when the left seems to adopt a stance on such issues. To make sense of this analytical discomfort, some argue that the left addresses *real* threats such as climate change whereas the right builds *imagined* dangers such as immigration. This stance is problematic because it marginalises and silences some voices, essentially arguing that only *some* concerns are valid, making a hierarchy among them and further alienating some sectors of society. This is however counterproductive as it may simply provide radical actors with more appeal, as they tend to defy communication norms and expectations and break what are perceived as 'taboo' topics.

As this thesis has argued, in line with a long tradition of securitisation studies, security is not necessarily the domain of 'objective realities' but that of subjective constructions and perceptions (Downing and Dron 2022, 1236). Identifying what security 'is' or 'is not' fails to truly capture the complexity of modern risk societies. What is analytically and societally more useful is to examine who uses the language of insecurity, how, why and with what effects. This allows us to embark on a more meaningful debate on how complex contemporary insecurity is made intelligible, by whom and for whom. Populist actors, in particular, seem to be skilled in the ability to

identify and articulate the insecurity experiences of the collective and make them intelligible, to society and to those who live them first-hand.

7.4. Alternative Explanations

As this research's main argument was substantiated with reference to a case study, the findings are not generalisable - nor they were intended to be. This also means that alternative explanations, dictated by the specificities of the context, need to be considered. This section engages in a self-reflective exercise, considering how the relevance of insecurity in the French context, negative campaigning, the spread of populism across the political system and LFI's office-seeking behaviour may provide an alternative reading of this research's findings. Ultimately, it establishes that although useful, these additional factors do not invalidate the research findings.

First of all, in France insecurity seems to be particularly relevant and salient. As Mayer (2018) has shown, *precarité* or the 'lack of basic securities' - which span from financial stability to health, from housing conditions to support networks - has been on the rise and represents a widespread phenomenon cutting through a number of sectors of the population. Alongside these sources of variegated insecurities, citizens' own perceptions of threat have also intensified and are more varied than in the past; French research shows that they are no longer confined to the 'traditional fear' of crime but now extend to a number of issues such as poverty, unemployment, terrorism and migration (Robert and Zauberman 2018). The contextual salience of insecurity may explain why actors other than those usually owning securitarian discourse are increasingly concerned with the topic. After all, as critical security studies scholars have often argued, security is increasingly becoming a dominant discourse that

shapes the contours of everyday politics. Security 'concerns' are cited in relation to a variety of issues which is leading to a feeling of pervasive insecurity across Europe and the routinisation of risk, hence producing a structural context that affects and shapes political framings (Balzacq, Leonard and Ruzicka, 2016; Huysmans 2006).

Moreover, as populism spreads across a political system, more and more actors are co-opting the ideas, style and rhetoric of populist parties (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021). In France, this has been shown to have particularly affected the presidency of Emmanuel Macron, as scholars have noted a contagion effect originating from the fierce competition provided by Marine Le Pen in the latest election cycles (Baloge and Hubé 2022; Shields 2021). This means that ideas about the relevance of insecurity can be co-opted by multiple actors, if considered part of a 'successful' populist repertoire. Seen in this light, a counter-reading of this thesis would contend that Mélenchon and his party are simply co-opting or mirroring the insecurity narratives of the PRR to compete with it.

An additional alternative reading of the research findings relates to the need for LFI to establish itself as a credible government party and the use of insecurity narratives as an instrument to achieve this goal. As stated on the party's own website, LFI is 'ready to govern' and hence explicitly an office-seeking party. As such, Mélenchon and LFI may have a strategic interest in discourses of threat. Based on existing theories, office-seeking actors have an incentive in warning the public of multiple risks, because the political consequences of ignoring threats are far more costly than 'hyping' them (Albertson and Gadarian 2015, 24). Given the salience of insecurity in the French context, as discussed previously, and the incentives in addressing the topic, this may explain why Mélenchon and LFI engaged so widely with the politics of insecurity in the period under consideration. After all, as explored in the

Expert Interviews study, being seen as addressing insecurity head-on is considered a way to build credibility as a responsible actor. This is particularly relevant in the French system, where the President is often perceived as somebody who must be able to gather the nation rather than being a divisive and ‘amatorial’ figure.

It is also important to consider that Mélenchon’s engagement with the politics of insecurity may be an example of ‘negative campaigning’. According to Nai and Walter (2015) ‘going negative’ within the political debate and especially during election campaigns, entails a focus on attacking political rivals. Attacks can be directed against a rival’s performance on policy issues (issue-based attacks) to frame it as ‘bad or harmful’ (Seeberg and Nai 2021, 626); they can also be directed at the rival as a person (character-based attacks) as an attempt to degrade them in the eyes of the wider public (ibid.). Based on the empirical findings examined here, Mélenchon and LFI have certainly used insecurity narratives as an attempt to silence their enemies from ‘speaking security’; this was done by representing them as sources of danger themselves, hence damaging their credibility to tackle existing threats. In this sense, the attacks against president Macron were emblematic of this logic. Similar attacks were directed at Le Pen, via the use of counternarratives, whereby Mélenchon and LFI tried to ‘dismantle’ her own interpretations on the state of contemporary to undermine the perception of her monopoly on the topic.

All in all, although these alternative explanations take into consideration the specificities of the French context and hence of the case study in itself, they do not necessarily run counter to the key argument advanced in this research, nor do they disprove the existence of an intimate relationship between populism and insecurity, as this thesis is arguing. The findings explored earlier have clearly shown how the relationship of insecurity identified by Mélenchon and LFI is evidently populist, with the

people and the elite fitting squarely into the role of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’. Even if Mélenchon and his party were solely motivated by avoiding the potential costs of ignoring threats, this does not explain the populist *essence* of their narratives. To put it differently, while this alternative reading could explain the *extent* of engagement with the politics of insecurity, it cannot explain the *substance* of the ideas that shaped those narratives, which are clearly structured along populist lines.

Hence while these context-driven explanations need to be taken into account, they do not invalidate the argument and hypotheses advanced in this research.

7.5. Contributions to the literature

The research findings explored earlier have provided a comprehensive assessment of how insecurity can be incorporated into the narratives of populist radical left actors. This helps shed light on how populists beyond the right can interpret and make sense of contemporary insecurity. Overall this research makes four contributions to the populism literature.

7.5.1. *Insecurity as an ideational resource*

First, this thesis demonstrates that **insecurity is a key ideational resource that different populists can use** to articulate the struggle of the ‘people against the elites’. By looking at the case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and LFI, the thesis has shown how the insecurity narratives of the party and its leader were shaped by left-wing ideas but were first and foremost populist, because these narratives systematically identified the people vs. the elites as the main ‘characters’ of the insecurity ‘story’. In turn, this

contributes to developing a broader understanding of populism, its characteristics and the logics behind the way populists understand, interpret but also construct social reality.

As I have argued, insecurity becomes the principle according to which the elites are pitted against the people: more than a moral argument centring on a virtuous people vs an evil elite, the logic of populism is pitting an insecure people against a dangerous elite. This research has shown that, regardless of host ideologies, the antagonism of populism is grounded on insecurity boundaries, as the people vs the elites struggle aligns along the lines of the danger vs. the endangered. This is because, whatever populists may perceive as a threat is inevitably brought back to the (direct or indirect) product of elite behaviour (or lack thereof), which makes them the ultimate cause of such dangers. This interpretation of contemporary society as in a state of pervasive insecurity at the hand of the elites is at the very origin of the people vs. elite struggle. Once social reality is understood in this way, this polarising division becomes the basis for challenging and rejecting the legitimacy of the establishment, not simply on the basis of the fact that the elites do not serve the general will of the people, but that, on a more profound and existential level, they *endanger* it. The elites are directly pitted against the 'insecure people' and challenged first and foremost based on the holistic experience of everyday insecurity that they cause, more than on their 'corrupt' and 'self-interested' character.

By looking at the populist left, this research shows that the relevance of narratives on insecurity is not only applicable to the populist radical right. While most would associate discourses on insecurity with a tactic that the PRR family utilises to frame its enemies (e.g., migrants and minorities) as threats to the people, this project showed that actors on the opposite side of the populist ideological spectrum can do the same.

Overall this thesis has shown that there are overlaps between how PRL and PRR actors map the origins and developments of contemporary insecurity perfectly along the people/elite struggle. This suggests that insecurity narratives have relevance in the political thought of both party families. However, despite the comparative element, this research was based on a case study and the validity and reliability of its argument and conclusion need to be tested and assessed against a wider sample of PRL actors (see Section 7.6. on Limitations and Future Research below). Therefore the thesis' main contribution is proposed in the form of having provided the rationale for future research to test the hypothesis that insecurity is an additional, core concept in the populist ideological structure that defines the people vs. elite struggle.

7.5.2. Populism, ideology and the radical left

Besides contributing to a better understanding of populism, this thesis adds to the populism literature by shedding more light on the populist radical left more specifically, hence ensuring an accumulation of knowledge on a case that has been comparatively less studied than its radical right counterpart in Europe.

More specifically, this research has provided an extensive account of how the *populist* features and *left* positioning of Mélenchon and LFI come together to shape their narratives on the state of insecurity in contemporary societies. It explored how the party and its leader understand, conceptualise and communicate insecurity, showing that although left-wing ideas play a central role in the articulation of their insecurity narratives, the latter were ultimately shaped by populist ideas.

Knowing more about the PRL allows us to refine extant theorisations on the areas of **distinctiveness** and **similarity** between different varieties of populism. The

parallels identified by this thesis concern the relationship of insecurity. As it has been shown, both LFI and RN identified the people and the elite as the danger and the endangered. They both personalised insecurity in the form of their archenemy, the establishment, as represented by president Macron. The fundamental difference, as expected, is in the content of those insecurity narratives and in particular in the phase of threat identification. Both parties are clearly guided by their host ideologies in determining *what* constitutes a threat in contemporary societies and for what *reasons*.

While this project started off by proposing the testing of the two hypotheses that currently divide the populism literature (the *populism trumps ideology* and the *ideology trumps populism* theses), it has provided a much more nuanced answer than anticipated. As explored in previous chapters, the insecurity narratives of Mélenchon and LFI display a complex intertwining of populist and left-wing ideas that these actors use as conceptual tools to make sense of what they see as threats and dangers. Building on the empirical evidence, I have argued that the politics of insecurity they perform is first and foremost populist, because the relationship of insecurity that is predominantly established systematically posits the people as *in danger* and the elites as *the danger*. This, however, does not automatically imply that populism trumps ideology. It rather shows a complex interconnection between populism and insecurity, which - I argue - may point to the relevance of insecurity within the populist ideological structure. Following my examination of a case study and the impossibility to further generalise, I have recommended this to be explored and tested in future research.

Hence splitting the field into these two competing theses (*populism trumps ideology vs ideology trumps populism*) is not likely to be useful or effective because it risks forcing into boxes and oversimplifying such a complex phenomenon as populism.

7.5.3. *Populist agency*

More generally, this research extends the work of political science scholars interested in the relevance of insecurity in redefining the political cleavage in Western Europe (Betz 1994; Kriesi 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018). These studies usually focus on examining the *structural* causes of contemporary insecurity, in particular, how ‘modernisation’ and ‘globalisation’ are contributing to reshaping party systems in Western Europe. They suggest that a novel cleavage has emerged and divides society between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. This is restructuring party competition, as populists champion the representation of those who feel they are losing out - be it economically, culturally or politically - to globalised elites, in contrast to mainstream parties which are thought of as siding and being part of ‘the establishment’.

In focusing on structural processes and individual preferences, these studies may overlook the agency of populist actors in interpreting societal phenomena and helping the public make sense of them. Studies on populist attitudes for instance seem to imply that citizens with those attitudes will be automatically driven to populists without considering the role of parties and leaders in articulating appealing ideas (Kefford, Moffitt and Werner 2021). With its focus on political narratives as guiding principles for citizens’ deconstruction of unfolding political developments, this thesis has brought the structural and individual levels of study together, highlighting how the same structural processes (e.g., globalisation) can be presented to the public with divergent interpretations. By problematizing how other populist actors beyond the ‘usual suspects’ of the populist radical right talk about security with their public, the project has underlined **the role of narratives in shaping public understanding while unveiling the agency of populist actors in guiding such processes of sense-making.**

Populists develop their insecurity narratives via a complex combination of populist ideas and the interpretations of social reality stemming from their host ideologies. They are not passive witnesses of 'contemporary insecurity' as if this was a pre-established reality that they could merely *observe*. On the contrary, they actively engage in its interpretation, and take part in the wider debate of who or what *should* be considered a threat, against whom, with what causes and effects. In doing so, populists are active players in the contest of defining what *constitutes* insecurity in modern society. The ideas stemming from their populist thin ideology and attached thick ideology seamlessly blend to provide a unique interpretation of the issues affecting the everyday life of 'ordinary people', reconducting those issues either directly or indirectly to the actions of those in power. Beyond the realm of ideas, populist agency is also manifested in the strategic advantages that engaging with the politics of insecurity may provide. As explored in depth in Chapter 6, insecurity narratives can help populists build a profile as responsible and caring actors, which is always difficult for new challenger parties such as LFI or more established parties considered as extreme such as RN. Populists may use insecurity narratives as a tool to distinguish themselves from and compete with other parties both on the right and left sides of the political spectrum. Competition and the need for differentiation go hand in hand with redefining security to provide alternative, often competing narratives to hegemonic discourse, in order to engage voters. Populists may also be motivated by a need to introduce new items and set the agenda, hence strategically utilising insecurity frames to increase salience given the sensitivity of the topic.

All in all, this suggests that populist parties are active and proactive mediators between structural changes and the impact that these have on citizens' own perceptions. They act as a filter that makes those changes intelligible.

7.5.4. Populism in conversation

Finally, this thesis contributed to the **populism literature by bringing it into conversation with other traditions**. Populism studies tend to be confined to very specific areas of study often overlooking the utility that interdisciplinarity can offer (Rooduijn 2019). Although cross fertilisation is on the rise, as evidenced for instance by the study of populism in IR or in the fields of social and political psychology, these 'encounters' between literatures are certainly not the norm. However, they are crucial in order to understand populism as a 'real world' phenomenon and not simply as a conceptual phenomenon. They bring additional complexity to the study of populism reflecting the real-world intricacy of party agency, strategy and communication, alongside citizens' feelings and interpretations of complex phenomena such as modern risks. Single disciplines lack the comprehensive theoretical frameworks needed to understand those interrelations. Instead of reinventing the wheel and providing non-original contributions that simply mirror discoveries in other disciplines, it is crucial for political science to engage more and more widely in intellectual debates that cross the boundaries between different areas of study. Doing so provides scholars with new lenses and conceptual devices to unpack populism, hence carrying the potential for innovative questions and hypotheses to be developed.

This thesis, for example, has shown the value of integrating constructivist theories of International Relations into the study of the populist politics of insecurity, allowing us to move beyond the more traditional understandings of security that were too analytically restrictive and unable to capture the complexity of how insecurity can be understood and interpreted in a world where not all threats are immediately intelligible. The thesis has also demonstrated the utility of the conceptual frameworks

originating from social and political psychology to understand ontological insecurity and the power of narratives to construct 'stories' that make sense of political issues and events, by identifying key characters and attributing a temporal element to socio-political developments.

In conclusion, this research has contributed to the political science literature by providing a wider framework for analysis that can help future research a) counter assumptions on the PRL that are analytically restrictive and b) develop new hypotheses into the differences and similarities between different forms of populism.

7.6. Limitations and future research

Having summarised this study's main findings and discussed the key contributions to the literature, this section concludes the thesis by reflecting on its main limitations and highlighting avenues for future research. The study has three key limitations.

The first limitation concerns the subjectivity of the researcher in determining the conceptual categories for empirical analysis. As it is often the case in qualitative research, the researcher's own interpretations and understandings may influence the validity and replicability of the data being generated. Moreover, the constructivist approach taken here, which essentially argues that anything can become a source of insecurity as long as it is articulated as such, broadened the empirical space considerably. This can make it apparently difficult to set clear and distinct boundaries between the conceptual categories applied to the empirical case. To address this limitation, this research took two key steps. First, it constructed a theoretical model for the politics of insecurity, which unpacked it as the result of key frames. The model was

developed by following closely the existing literature (most notably starting off from Beland's seminal conceptualisation of the politics of insecurity). It was then updated by integrating additional empirical work such as the grammar of insecurity developed by Gariup (2016). This ensured the empirical examination proceeded from a clear piece of theory that served as a roadmap. Secondly, it grounded these frames in an established 'vocabulary' of security which allowed it to capture the construction of issues as threats and dangers by relying on explicit linguistic references. This helped minimise the researcher's own subjective interpretation because only the frames displaying a specific use of words were selected and included in the final frequency counts.

The second limitation is that this research was based on a case study and its findings are not immediately generalisable to contexts beyond the one chosen in this instance. However, this was not the intended aim of this research. As the relationship between insecurity and the populist radical left has not been extensively studied, this generates a need to first explore it in depth, so that new hypotheses can be developed and then tested in comparative future studies.

A final limitation is that this research has focused primarily on language, neglecting other aspects involved in the construction and representation of insecurity. Although fully aware of other constructivist approaches to understanding security, most notably the focus of the Paris school (associated with the work of Didier Bigo; for an overview, Bigo and McCluskey 2018) on how insecurity can be 'performed' in the everyday, the decision to prioritise language was necessary in order to address the limitations stemming from subjectivity discussed earlier. This approach helped to pinpoint where insecurity lies for Mélenchon and LFI, who is affected and who is responsible for it.

As argued throughout, this thesis is only a starting point for understanding the relationship between insecurity, the populist radical left and populism more generally. Several research strands can stem from the present work, focusing on a) the supply side of the populist politics of insecurity, b) the audience perspective and, more specifically c) the communication of insecurity.

First of all, future research should focus more on the supply side and assess more empirical cases than what was examined here. Taking a comparative, cross-country perspective will be especially beneficial to test the hypothesis proposed here, that insecurity is an ideational resource that gravitates around the populist ideological structure. More research is also necessary to assess to what extent the themes defined as threatening follow ideological lines, and whether and *when* exceptions are made. It will be particularly useful to study how PRLs parties and leaders are rewarded or punished electorally when adopting themes that are perceived to be outside of their own ideological space. It is also important to examine the performance of insecurity in multi-party systems in which power is not entirely centralised in the office of the President, as in the French context. The concentration of power in the hands of Macron may make him an easy target of blame attributions, particularly from parties in opposition. However, in pure multiparty systems, the plurality of actors may open a contest over the interpretation of insecurity, because in such systems it may be less clear how to attribute responsibility for threats and dangers. Finally, there is an analytical need to study in a more granular way who can ‘speak security’ within the Left; this would imply going beyond political parties and examining personalities beyond the parliamentary arena, such as activists or leading ‘influencers’.

A second line of research originating from this thesis could assess the politics of insecurity in close relation to audience perceptions. This research did not measure the

impact on citizens' own internalisation of the insecurity narrative and the considerations they develop, but instead laid the ground for future research to tackle this parallel question. Future studies should identify the conditions determining the *relevance* of such messages to understand when they are more or less likely to be effective and shape public opinion on certain topics. They should also explore to what extent the relationships of insecurity built in populist discourse are successfully internalised as part of populist supporters' collective identity, that is, the identification as an 'insecure people'.

Finally, one last research strand originating from this thesis should go beyond the linguistic/verbal approach prioritised in this study. While this research captured insecurity via a narrow focus on language, other scholars should extend this work to understand how insecurity can be communicated without direct mentions of threats and dangers. This could be done visually, by privileging videos and images as units of analysis, especially in light of the increased interest in visual social media such as Instagram and TikTok shown by parties and political leaders, including populists. Future research should also examine the PRL's take on the politics of insecurity with discourse analysis approaches, delving into what insecurity can mean in different contexts and how it can be expressed with different words not usually captured by the 'standard' insecurity vocabulary. Finally, new studies could develop frameworks to capture how the politics of insecurity is *performed* and not only communicated and via which repertoires.

To conclude, this research has shown that insecurity can be an ideational resource of relevance to the populist radical left, as it is for the populist radical right. This has allowed us to rethink the relationship between (in)security and populism not

as something that is exclusive to some specific populism varieties. Hoping to push the analytical boundaries of populism studies, the thesis has laid the theoretical ground for future research to establish to what extent we can consider insecurity a core concept in the populist ideological structure.

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