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Populist Through and Through: Consistency, Variations, and Framing Anchors of Populist
Parties' Environmental Agendas

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Sociology

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Hermione Xiaoqing Zhou

Lewiston, Maine | Traditional territory of the Wabanaki Confederacy

May 6, 2022

Acknowledgement

There are far too many people and things that have shaped me into who I am today and given me inspiration and resilience to finish this work than I will be able to name. However, I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank as many of them as possible, especially those who are indispensable to my bitter-sweet journey at Bates in the past years.

First, to my advisor and mentor Francesco Duina. Thank you for your wisdom, guidance, support, and countless hours of unselfish teaching and mentoring from my first-year theory class all the way to the completion of this thesis. I would not have gotten anywhere near where I am today without you. Thank you to Professor Senem Aslam, Marcelle Medford, and James McCarthy for graciously joining my thesis defense panel to challenge me to think in deeper, more diverse and nuanced ways about this work, and to point me to directions of future inquiry. Thank you to Professor Emily Kane, Marcelle Medford, Heidi Taylor, and Mike Rocque for showing me wonders in the Sociological world.

To Ethan and Francis, I don't even know how to put my gratitude into words. Thank you for being the ridiculously amazing humans who have shaped and will continue to shape my entire worldview, and for showing me how to think, act, and live in this world. Thank you to Sonja and Carissa for always challenging me intellectually, teaching me so much about this world and myself, and holding me up to high standards. Thank you to the entire ES department for what you have taught me within and beyond classrooms, and for leading me into this field for my future pursuits.

Thank you to Professor Pamela for open arms, good conversations, and homey space with lovely Watson and Misha. Thank you to Andrew for being my moral compass and broadening my worldview with the best lectures. Thank you to Brian Shankar Adler for leading me into the world of drum sets, a true refuge for me during times of chaos and stress. Thank you to the staff at Bates dining services, facility services, security, and other offices for making my life on campus shamefully easy so that I have so much time to focus on this work.

Thank you to Dianna, for being the best friend and always bringing out the best part of me with laughter, unlimited hugs, and good conversations. Thank you, Elly, for grinding together in Hedge, for your support and insights, and for the final push that made this thesis possible. Thank you to the Women's Basketball Team for the incredible journey this season and for showing me the strength in hard work and staunch belief. Thank you to Haoyu, Oliver, Michelle, Salem, Margaret, Tasha, Chenemi, Sandia, Essie, Roe, Bri, Kirstin, Soph, Elliot and Anna, Celine, and so many wonderful human beings with whom I share a home away from home.

Thank you to my mom, grandma, grandpa, dad, and family for all you have done for me. Thank you for nurturing and also tolerating my rebellious and independent spirit. Thank you to Chunjuan'er, AHuang, and my cat Taco for being the best fluff balls who always keep my spirits up. Thank you to Hamilton track, DEH, MCU, Cao Dong, Mayday, and Twosetviolin for "productive" distractions in the past year.

Thank you, Haiyao, for being the anchor of my life.

Finally, thank you to the sun, earth, water, seeds, and life.

Abstract

Scholarship on the intersection between populism and the environment is growing. These works generally describe populist parties as negatively disposed toward the environment. For instance, those parties are seen as promoting climate denial and skepticism, and as resisting pro-environmental policies and partnerships. Scholars have offered three types of explanations to account for such negative positions: structural, ideological, and strategic. While valuable, these works suffer from three important limitations: they predominantly focus on populist parties from Europe, consider only right-wing populist parties, and give little attention to parties with potentially more positive approaches to the environment.

This thesis addresses these limitations by extending the analysis to Latin America and the U.S., left-leaning parties, and parties that adopt broadly pro-environmental agendas. The empirical analysis shows the landscape is significantly more varied than is currently understood. The thesis then argues that, despite the observable variations, populist parties' environmental agendas are ultimately anchored in their populist rhetoric. They are specifically grounded in three key populist features: people-centricity, nationalism, and anti-elitism. With that in mind, there are considerable variations in how these parties articulate the populist framing of their environmental agendas to fit their distinctive brand of populism. Overall, this thesis advances a fuller understanding of populism and populist parties' relationship to the environment.

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I. Introduction

Over the past decade, scholars and journalists alike have observed the proliferation of populism across the world which have brought waves of shocks, worries, and even fanaticism in its wake (e.g. Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Lewis, Barr, et al., 2019; Moffitt, 2016). Europe has become a particularly fertile breeding ground for populist parties. In the 2018 round of European national elections, one in four votes was cast for populist parties, compared to only 7% in 1998 (Lewis, Clarke, Barr, Holder, & Kommenda, 2019). Paralleling the events in Europe has been the rise of populist leaders to prominence and power across other parts of the world such as Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines.

Populists often attract supporters with ideologies, platforms and styles that are rarely expressed in traditional party politics. They have also adopted anti-elite, nationalist, and anti-globalization (or anti-immigration) positions. Many are boosted by the use of emotional and personal language, as opposed to official terminologies. With this unconventional approach to politics, populist parties have enjoyed considerable success across the world. To account for their ascent to power and their unique appeals to voters, sociologists and political scientists alike have sought to both define populism, and to explain why it has appealed to so many voters worldwide. In defining populism, academics have generally followed Cas Mudde's (2004) classical definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology. This definition makes sense of the populist parties' considerable variations, diversity of political stances, and malleability across traditional left-right party lines.

To account for the success of populism, scholars have identified several unique features that have helped populist candidates to attract voters. Central to populism is the powerful yet vaguely defined binary between the corrupt elite and the virtuous people. The former can refer to

any economic, political, media, or international elite who is believed to be undermining the well-being and interests of a morally virtuous people who have lost ground in an elite-dominated political and social sphere. The boundaries around how populists define “the people” often intersect with the borders of a state. This facilitates the incorporation of nationalistic sentiments. Populist leaders insert themselves into this choreographed binary by branding themselves as the political outsider and authentic representative of the people vis-à-vis the political status quo governed by the elites. In order to do so, they often interact directly with their voter base through social media, advocating for direct democracy to replace representative democracy as the ideal way to represent the common people.

Paralleling the rise of populism on the global stage has been the rise of environmental concerns, movements, and governmental actions in the context of the already rapidly warming (or heating) climate, more frequent occurrences of extreme weather and natural disasters, and increasingly alarming scientific knowledge of the irreversibility of the catastrophic, anthropogenic changes to the planet. Likewise, this field has attracted considerable attention from scholars hoping to make sense of state governments’ directions and decisions on key issues of environmental governance.

At the nexus of these two burgeoning fields is the budding research on the connection between populism and the environment. A large proportion of these studies has shown a generally negative correlation between populist parties and their views on the environment. This takes the form of, for instance, the promotion of supporters’ climate denial and climate skepticism (e.g. R. A. Huber, 2020), and persistent opposition to environmental policies and partnerships (e.g. Riedel, 2021).

In order to account for this trend, three types of explanations have been offered. Lockwood (2018) suggested two of them. The first is “structural,” focusing on economic and interest-based factors tying right-wing populist parties’ appeals to grassroots supporters’ desires. The second is “ideological,” centering on the right-wing populists’ “anti-elite, socially conservative, and nationalist values and their aversion to globalism, liberalism, and the loss of national sovereignty” (Buzogány & Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2021, p. 157). The ideological explanation has been more widely received and supported in the literature. This is evidenced by a special issue of *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* which investigates several Latin American and Asian populist regimes’ use of nationalist populist appeals to justify the aggressive extraction of natural resources (e.g. Kojola, 2019; McCarthy, 2019; Saguin, 2019). A third, and newer, explanation links the populist parties’ positions on environmental issues to the strategic seizure of political opportunities (e.g. Oswald, Fromm, & Broda, 2021).

Recently, some researchers have also begun investigating the development of some far-right populist parties’ unusual support for certain pro-environmental policies in Europe, under the framework of green patriotism (e.g. Ćetković & Hagemann, 2020; François & Adrien, 2021).

These works have offered important insight into the connections between populism and the environmental. However, they present three key limitations: they predominantly focus on populist parties from Europe; they consider only right-wing populist parties; and they give little attention to parties with broadly pro-environmental approaches.

In light of the literature’s limitations, this thesis aims to show that the landscape of populist parties’ environmental agendas is significantly more varied and nuanced than is currently understood. Populist parties across the political spectrum have presented both anti-environmental and pro-environmental agendas. Their environmental agendas also pertain to a

broad constellation of possibilities regarding their environmental rhetoric, stances, and policy proposals, and cover a wide range of environmental issues on natural resources (e.g. fossil fuels, minerals), air and water pollution, energy generation, land use, biodiversity and international climate governance. With that said, all populist parties' environmental agendas are ultimately anchored, in their specific renditions, in populist rhetoric. Specifically, they are grounded in three key populist features: people-centricity, nationalism, and anti-elitism.

Building on these core findings, the discussion chapter presents these case studies' contributions to new ways of understanding populism with regards to populist parties' core and secondary issues, an outward-facing construction of the enemy in populism, and populist parties' rare consensus on acknowledging environmental problems.

I conduct four case studies to illustrate these arguments. Each case study focuses on one populist party chosen by a combination of two variables: party family (right-wing or left-wing) and positions of environmental agendas (pro-environment or anti-environment). One reason for choosing these cases is to reflect geographical diversity across Europe, North and South America. These variations demonstrate the consistency of the populist anchors underlying these parties' environmental agendas across the spectrum. The four cases are: the U.S. Republic Party under Donald Trump (right-wing, anti-environment), the French National Rally under Marine Le Pen (right-wing, anti-environment), the Spanish Podemos under Pablo Iglesias (left-wing, pro-environment), and Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro's populist Socialist regime in Venezuela (left-wing, anti-environment).

Chapters II and III are a review of the scholarly literature on the core elements of populism, and on populism's intersection with the environment. Chapter IV outlines the methodology for this empirical investigation. Chapters V-VIII present evidence and analysis

from the four case studies. Chapters IX and X discuss key findings and reflect on their broader implications for populist parties' relationship with the environment, and populism at large.

II. Key Characteristics of Populism

Following the rise of populism across the world has been a growing interest in understanding it. Yet the approaches to define, operationalize, and conceptualize populism are numerous and diverse. Populism is an “essentially contested concept given that scholars even contest the essence and usefulness of the concept” (Gallie, 2019; Mudde, 2017, p. 27)

As crucial as various theoretical conceptualizations and debates on populism are, the focus of this thesis is concerns over the practical analysis of populist parties’ rhetoric on the environment. In order to analyze populist parties’ environmental agendas and demonstrate that they are ultimately anchored in core populist elements, I synthesize two central properties and five key elements of populism from the literature which are particularly relevant to this thesis’s four case studies. These characteristics overlap and reinforce each other. I elaborate upon each one in the sections below.

The first two sections discuss the two central theoretical properties of populism identified by scholars: 1) populism as a thin-centered ideology, and 2) populism as a discursive and rhetorical approach. These two properties act as cornerstones for identifying and understanding populism in various contexts. Sections 3-7 elaborate on five core elements shared by many populist parties across the globe.¹ They are the backbones for the analysis of populist parties’ environmental agendas in this thesis. These characteristics are: 3) the bifurcated construction of “the people” against “the elites”; 4) the evil elites and enemies of the people; 5) the virtuous and

¹ Even though I only identify three populist features as prominent anchors for populist parties’ environmental rhetoric in this thesis, all five of these populist elements introduced in this chapter are essential to understanding populism. Each element is indeed leveraged by different populist parties at varying degrees in the framing of their environmental agendas.

homogenous people; 6) malleability across party lines; and 7) direct democracy and anti-establishment tendencies.

1. A Thin-centered Ideology

As contentious as the discussions around the essence of populism are, Cas Mudde's (2004) classical definition of populism as a "thin-centered ideology" remains at the core of the concept. He stated, "Populism is only a 'thin-centered ideology', exhibiting 'a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts...[and it] can be easily combined with very different (thin and full) other ideologies, including communism, ecologism, nationalism or socialism'" (Freeden, 1998, p. 750; Ibid, 544). Taggart (2004, p. 274) resonated with this definition by pointing out that populism "lacks core values." He explained that populist parties' core values depend on the kind of heartland (see Section 4 below) to which they attach themselves. This leads to considerable variations in populist parties across the world.

Populist parties vary in terms of their views and expressions of politics, economics and social issues (Hawkins, 2009), as well as in terms of political agendas, cutting across traditional divisions such as those between right- and left-wing parties (e.g. Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), and between inclusive and exclusive stances targeting different groups (e.g. Duina & Carson, 2019). Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013, 2017) have pointed out that populism's malleability facilitates its continued relevance across countries over the years because it can adapt to any specific policy issue or stance due to the lack of a thick ideological core.

2. A Discursive and Rhetorical Approach

Unlike most ideology-rich political approaches such as liberalism and Marxism, populism has minimal ideological attachment, and hence many consider it to be a “discursive frame,” a “political style,” a “repertoire of performance,” or a “political discursive logic” (Bonikowski, 2016, p. 14; Curato, 2017, p. 146; Stauffer, 2021, p. 225). This makes populism a “strategic tool selected based on contexts” (Bonikowski, 2016, p. 14) tailored to the “rhetoric, emotional appeals, embodied practices, and narratives” used by populist leaders across the spectrum (Agnew & Shin, 2017; Jansen, 2011; Moffitt, 2016).

The discursive understanding of populism entails that political leaders can employ populist discourses as long as they adhere to the populist core of the conflict between the people and the elites (see Section 3 below). As opposed to other political ideologies, populism is not a fixed political position to be claimed by any individual or political party, but a convenient choice of framing employed at varying degrees and intensities on different issues that render them “‘more or less’ populist” at different times (Moffitt, 2016, p. 21).

3. The Bifurcated Construction of the “People” Against the “Elites”

Indeed, populism’s properties as a thin-centered ideology and a discursive approach can render it flexible and adaptive. Yet, the most consistent characteristic of populism identified with broad scholarly consensus is its core framing of the conflict between “the people” and “the elites”. This conflict is central to Mudde’s (2004, p. 543) definition of 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.” Foundational to a populist

discourse is the "normative distinction between 'the elite' and 'the people'" (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). Populism exemplifies a "Manichean outlook, in which there are only friends and foes. Opponents are not just those with different priorities and values, they are evil! Consequently, compromise is impossible, as it "corrupts the purity" (Ibid., de la Torre, 2018, p. 738; Oliver & Rahn, 2016). In addition, this antagonism is considered black-and-white; there is no middle ground or overlap between the two groups. Populists are suspicious of any political, economic, or cultural claim the elites make as they vow to listen to and follow the common wisdom of the people (Mudde, 2004; Oliver & Rahn, 2016; Stanley, 2008)

Yet the category of these two groups—the people and the elites—is not a "natural" or customary category in politics or society. Populists go to great lengths to construct and modify the identities of both groups and this binary through their rhetoric. Laclau (2005a) saw populism not as a political product but as a process in which the people are repeatedly named, defined, and articulated by the populists in various political debates (Laclau, 2005a, 2005b; Moffitt, 2016, pp. 23-24). This intrinsically dynamic model of populism is of great value and opens a wide range of possibilities to analyze the changing dynamics between the people and the elites at any given time, or on any given issue to unpack populist narratives.

4. The Evil Elites and the Enemies of the People

The elites are easier to define as a group within the populist "bifurcated construction". This designation generally refers to individuals who hold certain levels of power, authority or privilege in a given society. Examples of elites could include politicians, journalists, academics or business leaders. (Bonikowski, 2016, p. 10). They exert a disproportionate amount of power over the operations and organization of society. Yet, regardless of this power's legitimacy,

populists vilify any member of the elites and deem them the enemy of the people. Their problem is the “elites’ abandonment of the common good in favor of their own self-interest” (Ibid, p. 11); they are often portrayed as selfish, corrupt, and out of touch with the real people, and blamed as the source of crisis and of ordinary people’s plight in societies. These qualities facilitate populists’ vilification and demonization of the elite as antagonistic to the virtuous people.

Recently, Stauffer (2021, p. 225) has expanded this categorization of the elite in the populist dualism by arguing that populism is a “political discursive logic whose normative ideational core is the juxtaposition of ‘the people’ as the group it claims to represent with one or several particular antagonists.” The elite in the classic populist dichotomy is broadened to include larger, more malleable “other groups.” In this way, groups that are not conventionally associated with elitist privileges can also be antagonized, such as people of color or immigrants. As the antagonistic groups get expanded, the construction and conceptualization of the people as a vague but unified group become more crucial for populists in anchoring their rhetoric. The next section details how the people come to be, and what the people entail, in the populist rhetoric.

5. Constructing the Virtuous and Homogenous People

In contrast with populists’ construction of “the evil elites”, “the people” are glorified with desirable qualities such as decency, diligence, honesty, and championship of the common sense. They are often portrayed as the victims of elites’ actions which ignore, silence, and exploit them in all aspects of their lives. By glorifying and victimizing the ordinary people, populist leaders present themselves as the authentic representative of the virtuous people against the evil elites via “acquisition of political power...on behalf of the people” (Bonikowski, 2016, p. 11; Mudde, 2004, p. 558). Populist leaders claim that “they speak for the ‘silent majority’ of ‘ordinary,

decent people' whose interests and opinions are (they claim) regularly overridden by arrogant elites, corrupt politicians, and strident minorities" (Canovan, 1999, p. 5).

Nevertheless, the definition of the people and the boundaries around them are ambiguous. Bonikowski (2016, p. 11) has suggested that populist leaders purposefully choose not to specify the scope of the people in order to maximize their base. "The people" generally refers to everyone but the elites, anchored in the fundamental antagonism between these two groups. Brubaker's theory of vertical opposition supports this relational definition of "the people" as they are "defined not only in relation to those on top but also—still in the vertical dimension—in relation to those on the bottom" (2017, 363).

In some cases, the boundaries drawn for "the people" correlate with the boundaries of the nation (not the state), appealing to economic and social nationalism (Jansen, 2011). Mudde (2004, p. 549) has suggested that, for populism, "the step from 'the nation' to 'the people' is easily taken, and the distinction between the two is often far from clear." The nation can be understood as an "imagined community" that cohesively binds its citizens (Duina & Carson, 2019, p. 6). Whoever is included in the "imagined community" is considered a member of the people. In this way, the definition of "the people" is dependent on exclusion because "the people are understood as a bounded collectivity, and the basic contrast is between inside and outside" (Brubaker, 2017b, p. 363). Along these lines, populists often construct, as opposed to the people, outside threats and crises that catalyze the exclusive boundary around the people who can only be defended by populist parties (Agnew and Shin 2017; Balthazar 2017; Kenny 2017).

Similar but more inclusive than the idea of nationalism as the basis for defining "the people". Taggart (2004, p. 274) introduced the concept of the "heartland" which "represents an idealized conception of the community they serve. It is from this territory of the imagination that

populists construct the ‘people’ as the object of their politics.” The heartland appeals as a primordial basis for individuals’ shared identity (Taggart, 2000). The image of the heartland is constructed from an idealized past for which the people are nostalgic, and the populists aim to bring back a desirable past with “a good life before the corruptions and distortions of the present” (Ibid.). Yet “the people” belonging to the heartland are fixed in an endless process of being named and defined, as “heartlands are something that is felt rather than reasoned...different positions can implicitly conjure up heartlands that differ from each other” (Taggart, 2004, p. 275). The heartland is as malleable and subject to change as any concepts employed in the populist rhetoric, meaning the people representative of the heartland change accordingly too.

Despite these subtle variations and fluidity in the construction of “the people,” it is ultimately “a homogeneous and virtuous community” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 151) that lacks internal division or further categorization as opposed to the disparate groups included under “the elites.” Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008, p. 3) provide an informative summary of populists’ conceptualization of the people and the elites in their study of contemporary Western European populism. They define populism as “an ideology which pits a virtuous and homogenous people against a set of elites and dangerous “others” who are collectively depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice.”

6. Malleability Across Party Lines

As mentioned above, populism is a thin-centered ideology with specific values attached to it. This lack of core ideological attachments renders it malleable, capable of “adjust[ing] to

[the] perceptions & needs of different societies” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 150). One area of adaptability that separates populist parties from most traditional political parties is their malleability across party lines.

Firstly, populist parties are able to reside on different ends of the political spectrum to “cut across substantively quite different forms of politics” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 151). Both the political right and the political left use populism by adjusting their definitions of “the people” and “the elites” based on various host ideologies to which they adhere (Mudde, 2004, pp. 548-550).

It could be argued that since populist parties merge with those from either side of the political spectrum, there is little value in distinguishing between right- and left-wing populism. However, scholars have found substantial variation between left- and right-wing populist articulation and stances on various issues. This further buttresses populists’ adaptability to disparate political traditions and social contexts. Right-wing populist parties tend to define “the people” based on exclusionary ethnic constructs and the idea that “the enemies of the people are identified as minority populations” (de la Torre, 2018, p. 744). Brubaker (2017b, p. 363) has suggested that for left-wing parties, the people’s bounded collectivity is usually defined by political or economic concerns such as outside threats from unregulated globalization or economic imperialism. Yet, populist parties can even blend and cross ideologies from both the right and the left, as long as they adhere to the core “people v. elite” dichotomy (see Duina & Carson, 2019).

Additionally, political actors possess the freedom to choose whether and when to use populist rhetoric. Politicians can switch it on and off under different circumstances. Mudde (2004, p. 545) has observed that “many of the quintessential contemporary ‘populists’ do not

always use a populist discourse.” Because of its lack of attachment to certain ideologies, populism is deployed by politicians at different stages of their political careers according to their needs. Bonikowski (2016, p. 15) has found that as politicians progress through their careers, they tend to employ less populist narrative and switch back to adherence to the more traditional party lines for rhetorical and campaign strategies.

7. Anti-establishment and Fighting for Direct Democracy

Despite the thin-centeredness of populist ideology, politicians and parties who rely on populist rhetoric tend to use similar strategies to set the blueprint for their policies. Counterintuitive to their often aggressive and radical appearances and their dismay with existing elite political institutions, populists do not seek to overturn the structure underpinning society. Populism is, after all “reformist rather than revolutionary”, and it does “not want to change the people themselves, but rather their status within the political system” (Mudde, 2004, p. 546). Ultimately, populists seek to change who are elected to represent the people in the governing body. They position themselves as the authentic representative of the people as opposed to the parties in power which are labelled as elites. Populist parties have “presented themselves as the exact opposites of the established parties...championing the common sense & decent values of ‘the people’” (Ibid., 548).

In addition, populism also emphasizes democracy and seeks to achieve “antagonistic re-politicization: the claim to reassert democratic political control” (Brubaker 2017, 364). Yet, the democracy populists seek to reassert differs from the functioning model in most democratic countries. Populists seek direct democracy or majoritarianism where the will of the majority is the guiding principle for organizing society. Measures in place to protect minority rights and the

checks and balances that are essential to liberal democracy are considered hostile elite constructions which restrict the people's democratic power. Thus, populists call for "the replacement of existing intermediate political institutions with more direct forms of participation" (Bonikowski, 2016, p. 11). For populists, direct democracy is a straightforward means of organizing society where they see "popular sovereignty [as] the only legitimate source of political power" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 151).

Populists also apply this simplified approach to democracy to their policy plans. Weyland (2001, p. 14) captured this when he conceptualized populism "as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on the direct, unmediated, institutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers." Populists often trim complexities and nuance from issues and brand an over-simplified solution as understandable, practical, and responsive to the will of the people. Their policy framework is usually "reductive...rejects nuanced political arguments in favor of moral outrage...encourages politics based on fear and resentment rather than informed policy debate" (Bonikowski, 2016, p. 22). In addition, populist parties rely on charismatic leaders. This type of leader distinguishes themselves from the political leaders in power by emphasizing that they are outsiders of the establishment, they represent the true interests of the people, and more importantly, they are members of the people. In this way, populist leaders appear to be real alternatives to the elite political establishment.

III. Literature Review

Two developments in the most recent decade have captured considerable attention in the political arena. One is the growing awareness of the urgency of climate change which has led to calls for climate policies at all levels of governance. Another is the rising tide of populism around the world. These two phenomena were studied extensively but separately until a few years ago when scholars began unpacking the connections between populist parties, and their environmental stances and policies. In this nascent but burgeoning field, several key trends can be identified in terms of research directions and approaches. The next sections summarize and review these lines of inquiry from three prevailing directions: 1) descriptive studies on the relationship between populism and the environment; 2) explanatory studies on the relationship between populist parties and their anti-environmental tendencies; and 3) new developments in the field, unpacking the positive correlations between populist parties and certain pro-environmental policies.

1. Descriptive Studies on the Intersection Between Populism and the Environment

One direction in this scholarly field is to investigate negative correlations between populist parties and environmental attitudes or policy agendas. These studies approach the subject in one of two ways: individual-level analysis, and party- or policy-level analysis. The individual-level analysis has been presented by several large-scale quantitative studies on populist supporters and their attitudes towards the environment. Populist parties and their supporters are characterized by climate denial, climate skepticism, and opposition to climate policies. The broadest analysis was conducted by Kulin, Johansson Sevä, and Dunlap (2021) on 23 countries' 2016 European Social Survey data. Using measures of climate skepticism and voter

attitudes on increasing fossil fuel taxes as an indicator of attitudes towards climate policies, they found that those who supported right wing populism (RWP) were more likely to hold nationalistic ideologies. Such ideologies were also correlated with higher levels of climate skepticism and opposition to climate policies (ibid.). This general trend supports the results obtained from a longitudinal analysis in the UK from 2007 to 2016; Batel and Devine-Wright (2018) found that the rise of RWP and post-truth politics had steered many voters to choose more conventional fossil-fuel based “independent and competitive energy policies” over renewable energies, as justified by “right-wing populist post-truth logic” (42).

Huber and his colleagues conducted two studies on this topic, one in the UK and one in the US, yielding similar results. In the US study, a survey of 3,000 people coupled with observational and experimental data showed that populist attitudes accentuate existing partisan cleavages where populist Republicans oppose climate policies more than non-populist Republicans (R. A. Huber, Fesenfeld, & Bernauer, 2020). In the UK, using the British Election Study, R. A. Huber (2020) found that the effect of populism acts independently of political ideologies. Populist supporters generally reject climate and environmental policies based on their anti-elite attitudes. Lastly, Yan, Schroeder, and Stier (2021) employed a novel mixed method approach combining survey responses and web browsing histories from respondents in 6 European countries to identify a link between RWP and climate skepticism. Two small-scale case studies also aligned with this line of research. Kojola (2019) found that Donald Trump’s populist campaign in the US used populist, nationalistic, and racist rhetoric to mobilize extractive populism in mining communities. Using data from the Austrian National Election Study, R. A. Huber, Greussing, and Eberl (2021) unpacked two channels through which populism encourages climate skepticism within its voter base.

Another type of analysis focuses on the correlation between populism and anti-environmentalism with broader units of analysis at both the party- and policy-level. The broad consensus in this line of literature is that populist parties, especially right-leaning ones, oppose climate policies and treaties; their international and global nature runs contrary to those parties' nationalist appeals (Forchtner, 2019; Schaller & Carius, 2019; Tosun & Debus, 2021; Vihma, Reischl, & Nonbo Andersen, 2021). Policy outcomes and political agendas are the main measurements scholars use to assess populist parties' political stances on the environment. Two qualitative studies in this field have used greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (or carbon dioxide emissions) as indicators of environmental policy outcomes to argue that populist governments across the EU perform worse in curbing GHG emissions than non-populist governments (Böhmelt, 2021; Jahn, 2021).

Other studies in this field have used case studies to lay out the extractive resource policies employed by populist governments across the world. In a 2019 special issue in the journal *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, several studies highlighted the convergence of extractivism, populism, and authoritarian governance across case studies (McCarthy, 2019). Lyall and Valdivia (2019) showed how the “petro-populist” government in Ecuador leveraged the volatile oil market to speculate and extract fossil fuels in order to profit and remain in power. As mentioned above, the Trump campaign in the U.S. utilized the populist frame to rally electoral support by feeding into the nationalistic, nostalgic, gendered, and racialized sentiments of mining communities in the South (Kojola, 2019). Two case studies have been conducted on populist governments in Asia, in Mongolia (Myadar & Jackson, 2019) and in the Philippines (Saguin, 2019). Myadar and Jackson (2019) have shown how populist

governments have skillfully politicized natural resource problems and advanced their own extractive agendas for gold mining, while Saguin (2019) has done so for fisheries.

This focus on national extractivist populist policies was expanded by another special issue in the journal *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* in 2021 which focused on populism in Mexico, Poland, and Brazil. Solorio, Ortega, Romero, and Guzmán (2021) argued that left-wing inclusive populism under Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has prioritized the extraction of natural resources at the expense of indigenous communities whose values, identities and struggles are anchored in natural conservation. Back to far-right populism in Brazil, environmental governance once in place has been dismantled by the political tactics promoting a “total extractivism” under a populist appeal (Menezes & Barbosa Jr, 2021). Similarly, Poland’s populist Law and Justice (PiS) party has pushed for environmental nativism. It has conducted a full-blown assault on the structure in place for Poland to transition away from coal and into renewable energies. This has caused Poland to again become carbon-dependent (Riedel, 2021). Additionally, Andreucci (2018) has noted the extractive nature of Bolivia’s left-wing populist Morales government. Also, Sedlak (2017) analyzed Canada’s experience under populist Stephen Harper who rejected treaties on climate change and eviscerated the nation’s environmental agencies.

This strand of literature has proliferated over the years. Yet several major shortcomings have emerged, especially in the methodological approaches they have employed. Firstly, despite the contributions from two special issues, most studies in this field have been Eurocentric, and a great majority of the quantitative work has been conducted in a European context. Less work has highlighted cases in Latin America, Asia, and North America, and most has relied on single case studies. As such, there has been a dearth of comparative studies which cross continental

boundaries. Secondly, most of the quantitative studies in this field have relied on generalizing a few statistical measures to correlate populism with either climate performance metrics focused on fossil fuel policy or GHG emissions, or voter attitudes and beliefs. Or some qualitative inquiries are narrowed to use single-country case studies. Thus, attention is lacking in the middle ground between large-scale generalization and detailed specification in terms of sample and methodological selection.

2. Explanatory Studies on Populism and Anti-environmental Tendencies

A separate and parallel research stream has sought to uncover and account for the connections between populism and hostility towards environmental actions. Over the past several years, three major camps of explanations have surfaced—structural, ideological, and strategic. The cornerstone piece in this field was written by Lockwood (2018) who delineated two general explanations for RWP’s hostility towards climate agendas. The first explanation is “structural.” It stems from the populist roots in the economic and political marginalization of their grassroots supporters who feel left behind “in post-industrial societies through structural change in the global economy” (ibid, 718). The second explanation, which Lockwood deemed more potent, is “ideological”; it centers on the “right-wing populism’s anti-elite, socially conservative, and nationalist values and their aversion to globalism, liberalism, and the loss of national sovereignty” (Buzogány & Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2021, p. 157; Fraune & Knodt, 2018; Lockwood, 2018).

Most of the explanations proposed in this literature fall within the ideological camp. Some scholars have concluded that the ideological cleavage between the political left and right account for most of RWP’s hostility towards the environment. In a comparative study of two

right wing populist parties (RWPPs), two leftwing populist parties (LWPP) and two valence populist parties from Austria, Czechia, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain, RWPPs were found to be “more likely to advance post-factual ‘anti-elitist’ discourse”. Meanwhile, “left-wing and left-leaning valence populists rely on populist discourses to demand more ambitious ECP [energy and climate policy] measures” (R. Huber, Maltby, Szulecki, & Četkovic, 2021, pp. 1011-1012). Similarly, Berker and Pollex (2021) compared parties’ reactions to the environmental movement *Fridays for Future* at the sub-national level in Germany. They found a distinct polarization of their positions along party lines in which the RWPP Alternative for Germany (AfD) was most opposed to the movement. Regarding the correlation between individual political preferences and attitudes towards the environment, they also found that RPWW supporters are more likely to be skeptical towards climate change and opposed to climate actions than those on the left (Yan et al., 2021).

Even though the left-right political division has proven to be a significant ideological factor correlated with attitudes towards climate policies, R. A. Huber (2020, p. 959) has argued that populism should be treated as “independent of political ideology” and that it “offers an orthogonal dimension to partisanship and left-right self-placement, which broadens the scope of the concept.” Many studies have done precisely this, building on Lockwood’s ideological explanation of the RWPP’s hostility towards the environment while treating populism as an independent factor, exerting considerable influence on parties’ climate policies and attitudes. Koch and Perreault (2018) have proposed the theoretical framework of resource nationalism referring to “the multiple ways in which physical and biological environments and resources become politically understood as inextricably linked to national identities, fortunes, and prospects” (ibid, 611). To demonstrate its salience, they applied it to cases in Kazakhstan,

Bolivia, and the U.S. In an array of studies, researchers have named similar unique populism-orientated (anti-)climate policy agendas with an array of terms such as resource nationalism and climate nationalism.

Several papers in the special issue *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* (mentioned above) have noted that populist regimes in Latin America and Asia have connected populism and its nationalistic appeals to justify the extraction of natural resources such as petroleum in Ecuador (Lyll & Valdivia, 2019), copper and gold in Mongolia (Myadar & Jackson, 2019), coal mining in the U.S. (Kojola, 2019), and fisheries in the Philippines (Saguin, 2019). Resource nationalism is also an intrinsic characteristic in Latin American politics as Solorio et al. (2021, p. 249) have stated, “In Latin America, the relationship between populism and environmentalism is intrinsically linked to extractivism.” In addition to the Ecuador “petro-populism” studied by Lyll and Valdivia (2019), Menezes and Barbosa Jr (2021) have detailed how Bolsonaro’s populist government in Brazil systematically dismantled existing environmental governance and opened up natural resources for full exploitation; Andreucci (2018) and Solorio et al. (2021) dissected how anti-indigeneity and populism go hand-in-hand in extractivist policies under populist governments in Bolivia and Mexico, respectively. Similar trends have been found in Europe. Poland’s refusal to transition to renewable energy and its continuation of carbon-dependency has been explained by the environmental nativist campaign under the populist party PiS (Riedel, 2021). In quantitative studies, nationalism has also been found to have strong correlations with anti-environmental attitudes among populist supporters (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2018; Kulin et al., 2021).

More recently, scholars have proposed a third explanation for the connection between populism and climate hostility—strategic explanations. They argue that populist environmental

policy orientations are chosen based on the political opportunity structures available in certain time windows. Oswald et al. (2021) conducted a comparative study of the French populist party RN and the German populist party AfD. They argued the “diverging strategies in dealing with environmental issues and which specific topics to focus on” are “at least partially the result of political opportunity structure and the nature of populism as a strategy” (ibid, 196). Therefore, these two populist parties’ environmental policy orientations are “strategically motivated” (ibid, 202), setting themselves apart from the structural and ideological explanations of previous studies. Similarly, the Austrian populist Freedom Party’s support of an environmental protection glyphosate ban has been found to be motivated primarily by the electoral opportunity to expand their voter base (Tosun & Debus, 2021).

Even though the literature has presented various explanations accounting for the overwhelmingly negative relationship between populism and environmental agendas, there is a significant analytical step missing in the understanding of connections between populism and environmental agendas. Few studies have accounted for exactly *how* populist parties connect their environmental agendas within their populist framework. As many have followed the line of ideological explanation on why populist parties’ hostility towards climate change has stemmed from their central antagonism of “the people v. the corrupt elite” or nationalism, many have failed to take this step forward to illustrate *how* it is accomplished. Further, those arguing for ideological explanations rarely consider other possible policy orientations under populist regimes, namely, not outright hostility but favorable environmental policy stances. Just like the novel strategic explanations of populism and environmental stances, some studies have broken away from the established mainstream focuses and approaches in this field. In the upcoming section, I review some of these new developments.

3. New Developments in RWPP's Support for Pro-environmental Policies

A recent development in the literature has been the identification of RWPP's support for certain pro-environmental policies at the national level. RWPP would defend these policies if they conform with nationalistic or patriotic values. Some scholars have called this new trend "green patriotism" (Forchtner, 2019; François & Adrien, 2021). In a case study of three Nordic populist parties—the Danish People's Party (DF), the Finns Party (PS), and the Sweden Democrats (SD)—researchers found that their climate stances were "not set in stone", but more nuanced and subject to change (Vihma et al., 2021). For example, the DF was initially alienated from many voters because of its climate denialism. This later prompted it to "move away from vaguely denialist rhetoric and to initiate a more progressive position than most European populist parties" (ibid, 231). The PS and SD have embraced climate policies yet endeavor to separate themselves from established parties by challenging "political correctness" in the context of climate change, and advocating for climate policies from their own nationalistic standpoints (ibid, 232). Ćetković and Hagemann (2020) have studied populist parties' policy influences regarding GHG and energy policies in six Western European countries over the past decade. They found mixed results in policy outcomes as well. Although populist-controlled ministries are usually connected with low environmental performance, they indirectly contribute to the low-carbon transition by polarizing the political arena and opening space for smaller, more progressive parties. Similar nuance has been found in both RN in France and PiS in Poland which have been virulently opposed to wind power while being supportive of small-scale renewable projects (Szulecki & Ancygier, 2015; Timperley, 2017). Gemenis, Katsanidou, and Vasilopoulou (2012) also found that against the background of populist parties' hostility to

environmental policies, the Austrian Freedom Party, Danish People's Party and Hungary's populist Jobbik movement have all appeared to be supportive of renewable energy.

There have been many exciting developments in this literature on the intersection between populism and the environment. Yet, they still have several limitations: 1) geographically, they concentrate on populist parties in Europe; 2) with regards to party families, they focus on (radical) right-wing populist parties; 3) methodologically, they use either large-sample quantitative analysis or single case studies; and 4) directionally, they highlight populist parties' connections to climate denial, skepticism, and hostile climate policies over positive connections; 5) in terms of purpose, they focus either exclusively on establishing statistical correlations or proposing explanations.

Thus, I situate this thesis within the nexus of these research gaps in the literature on the connection between populism and the environment. In order to take the initial step to address these research limitations, I deploy a comparative analysis of four populist parties (addressing #3) across Europe, North and South America (addressing #1) from different party families (addressing #2) to unpack how their pro-environmental and anti-environmental (addressing #4) agendas are anchored in key elements of their populist rhetoric (addressing #5).

IV. Methodology

Given the objective of showing populist parties' anchor of their environmental agendas in core populist elements, I have chosen four populist parties as case studies. These four case studies cross the axis of variation on two fronts: party family (right-wing or left-wing) and positions of environmental agendas (pro-environment or anti-environment). I have chosen one case study per combination of the two characteristics (see Table 1). They cover Europe, North America, and South America. These variations are designed to demonstrate the consistency of populist parties' framing of environmental agendas across the spectrum.

	Anti-environment	Pro-environment
Right-wing	Republican Party under Donald Trump, USA	National Rally under Marine Le Pen, France
Left-wing	Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro's regime in Venezuela	Podemos under Pablo Iglesias, Spain

Table 1. Case Study Selection and Operationalization

Populist parties chosen along party lines are the ones which appear clear and consistent as to which side of the political spectrum they reside upon. On stances of populist parties' environmental agendas, they pertain to a broad constellation of possibilities of a party's environmental rhetoric, stances, and policymaking. They can be related to an array of issues such as the use, exploitation or preservation of natural resources (e.g. fossil fuels, underground minerals), air and water pollution, energy generation, land use, biodiversity, or international climate treaties. Pro-environment parties are identified as parties with favorable environmental agendas that support a range of environmental and conservation measures, in practice,

rhetorically, or both. Pro-environment indicators include support for renewable energy, international climate treaties, and resource conservation. Conversely, I identify anti-environment parties as parties with adverse environmental agendas that reject environmental or conservation measures either in practice, rhetorically, or both. These parties tend to support measures like resource extraction, deregulation of the environment, and continued reliance on fossil fuels

Following Odell's (2003) recommendation, I have chosen the cases based on their match with the key operationalizations I employ, and based on which provides the most analytical value. I chose these cases because each has clearly identifiable environmental agendas that fall into either one of the two categories (pro-environment or anti-environment). Moreover, each is clearly identifiable as a left- or right-wing party. Each party I have chosen also has strong political prowess in its respective country's political sphere which ensures the relevance, significance, and validity of the case studies. This does not necessarily require the populist party to be in power. Rather, their prowess can be shown in a variety of ways such as general electoral support, participation in major government coalitions, seats taken in parliament, key offices occupied by party members, and influences, disruption, or shock to the domestic political sphere. I introduce each populist party at the beginning of its respective chapter.

For this, I use qualitative content analysis to unpack the discursive logic behind populist parties' environmental agendas. I choose texts to analyze that are pertinent and revealing of populist parties' rhetoric surrounding their environmental agendas. To do this, I analyze audio and visual sources in the form of transcribed texts with occasional references to their visual forms which appear particularly relevant to their rhetoric. This selection is intended to be neither comprehensive nor random, but to be most relevant and revealing about the ways by which populist parties employ discursive logic on environmental issues and policies. I use NVivo to

assist with inductive coding of all data and perform at least two rounds of coding to cross-check the coding keys' validity.

The main unit of analysis is the populist party. In this thesis, I investigate how populist parties frame their environmental agendas on key areas such as climate change, renewable energy, natural resource extraction and global climate treaties. All data are drawn from primary sources directly published by or related to populist parties in question such as official party platforms, public statements, press releases, party leaders' and key members' speeches and interviews, as well as secondary sources such as news reports and academic articles. Primary data from non-English speaking countries are either obtained as translated English texts from the data source or are cross-translated by translation software (Google Translate and DeepL). There is considerable variation in terms of the type, quantity, and richness of the data available for each case study. Therefore, I highlight detailed data sources drawn for each case study in their respective chapters.

V. Right-wing, Anti-environment Party: GOP under Donald Trump in United States

The first of the four case studies starts with an analysis of a right-wing populist party's anti-environmental agendas. I turn to the U.S. Republican Party (GOP) during Donald Trump's 2016~2020 presidency. Among all four case studies, this case covers the shortest time period, yet it has the broadest anti-environmental agendas anchored in the most diverse set of populist rhetoric.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Trump-style populism and his anti-environmental agendas. Then, four sections are introduced and later expanded. The first section focuses on an outlier of Trump's pro-environmental rhetoric along populist lines while the subsequent three sections each dives into a distinctive populist feature of his broad anti-environmental agendas.

Overview: Donald Trump, Populism, and Ant-environmental Agendas

In the United States, Donald Trump's right-wing, populist administration broke away from and undermined a wide range of political norms and values that took decades to take root in the U.S. Trump led the tide of furious backlash against multiculturalism, racial and gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, immigration, good-will foreign relations, etc. Consistent with GOP's anti-environmental and neo-liberal history, as well as Trump's appeal to a voter base who felt left behind by their government and abandoned by globalization, Trump's administration waged a war on the environment during his four years in office. He rolled back over 100 pieces of major environmental rules governing a wide range of issues such as toxic chemicals and pollution, natural resource extraction, clean water and air, biodiversity, and global climate actions (Popovich, Albeck-Ripka, & Peierre-Louis, 2021).

The Trump administration's attack on the environment was simple and direct. It aimed to reverse any piece of pro-environmental regulation within reach and to open up as many natural resources for extraction as possible. Almost like a reincarnation of the white, Manifest Destiny "trailblazers," Trump enacted policies that swept across land, water, and natural resources from indigenous and marginalized communities, destroyed well-protected ecosystems, left debris and harm that would take decades to be cleaned up (if possible). All these were done in the name of building a strong nation for the American people who ironically only pertain to a very narrow group of Americans.

Examining closely, these seemingly straightforward anti-environmental agendas pushed by the Trump administration were actually anchored in a multi-faceted populist rhetoric. Three distinctively populist elements underpinned Trump's anti-environmental agendas. These elements are: (1). People-centricity, appealing to the people with job security, dignity, and prosperity by building a de-regulated, American-first, energy-intensive economy; (2). Anti-elitism justifying the reversal of Washington elites' self-interested pro-environmental legislations in order to represent the real interests of the American people; and (3). Resource nationalism and energy sovereignty coupled with hostility towards foreign powers to assert America's global dominance based on the "America First" principle.

Three upcoming sections highlight each of these three populist elements anchoring Trump's anti-environmental agendas respectively. Every section begins with a general overview of the populist element and then—with the aid of two sub-sections each—dives into how the populist element connects to and anchors Trump's diverse set of anti-environmental policies and rhetoric in more detail.

To this above, one section needs to be added first, giving attention to what might seem like a conceptual outlier: some of Trump's occasional pro-environmental expressions. They are, still, rooted in the same populist rhetoric, articulating immense nationalistic pride in the great American nature, and the obligation to preserve it for the American people.

The following sections draw evidence from official statements, announcements, speeches, Twitter posts and legislation by Trump himself, key officials, and offices under his administration. We begin with an outlier case of Trump's pro-environmental gestures and then move to three sections on the core populist features of his anti-environmental agendas.

The Outlier: Preserving the Great American Nature for American People

Prior to analyzing the general anti-environmental policies and rhetoric of Trump's administration, this section begins by recognizing a superficial yet crucial pro-environmental aspect within his rhetorical approaches to the environment. These were occasional expressions of great appreciation for and pride in the American natural beauty, landscape, and abundant natural resources. They often come hand-in-hand with expressions of obligations to preserve nature for the American people. In these instances, Trump concealed his usual hostile anti-environmental agendas with a veneer of positivity and appreciation. Although their appearances seemed to be very context-specific and at odds with his general anti-environmental rhetoric, these positive framing of the environment were, just like Trump's anti-environmental agendas, important in showing Trump's consistent utilization of populist anchors for his environmental rhetoric.

The *Land Conversation Bill* was one of few legislations passed with bipartisan support under Trump that remotely resembled the idea of environmental protection. When Trump announced the bill, he stated that it was “the passage of truly landmark legislation that will

preserve America's majestic natural wonders, priceless historic treasures...these exquisite resources is the most glorious heritage a people have ever received" (Associated Press, 2020). This characterization of America's natural environment screamed nationalistic pride, particularly in America's abundant natural resources.

Similar language and expressions of national pride can be found in Trump's annual *Earth Day* statements where he repeatedly referred back to the same idea of the proud and unique heritage of the American natural beauty. In each year's statement, Trump always went back to similar points on the unique gift of American nature: "Americans are rightly grateful for these God-given gifts" (Donald J. Trump, 2017m); "The blessings given to us by our Creator. Among them, we cherish our magnificent land and waterways, abundant natural resources, and unique wildlife" (Donald J. Trump, 2018c); "From the Appalachian Mountains to the golden shores of California, America is blessed with some of the most beautiful scenery on Earth. As Americans, we all share an immense pride in these God-given treasures and a tremendous appreciation for our abundance of natural resources" (Donald J. Trump, 2019a); and "The United States is blessed with breathtaking and plentiful natural wonders and resources, providing recreation and sustenance to millions throughout our country" (Donald J. Trump, 2020a). These show that Trump held immense pride in America's natural resources and majestic beauty. Such pride was often expressed in a populist and nationalistic fashion where he never pointed to any single site of natural wonder without putting it in the context of the American nation and the American people.

His pro-environmental remarks were embedded in strong populist sentiments through multiple references to preserving the natural beauty for the American people and their future generations. The American nature under the Trump administration was, above all, for

Americans' enjoyment and leisure. This theme was present in all four of his *Earth Day* statements: "Americans are rightly grateful for these God-given gifts and have an obligation to safeguard them for future generations" (Donald J. Trump, 2017m); "As a nation, it is our duty to recognize the importance of these life-sustaining gifts, and it is our responsibility to protect them for our own benefit and that of generations to come...preserving the blessings of the land for future generations" (Donald J. Trump, 2018c); "We reaffirm our responsibility to protect God's wondrous creation for future generations" (Donald J. Trump, 2019a); "We reaffirm our commitment to protecting our natural treasures for the benefit and enjoyment of all Americans...We pledge to continue doing our part to ensure that Americans are able to enjoy the natural splendor of our beautiful Nation now and for generations to come" (Donald J. Trump, 2020a).

These statements invoked the most inclusive depiction of the people in Trump's populist rhetoric, laying minimal boundaries around this identity. In this case, anyone who benefits from the American nature was included as the people and he appealed to them through the classic environmental rhetoric on the preservation of nature for future generations. And Trump himself was glorified as the great populist leader on a mission to conserve nature for them all.

Nevertheless, if one was to place these "environmentally friendly" and conservation-oriented gestures in the repertoire of the Trump administration's environmental agendas, they immediately stand out as outliers. They were necessary concessions Trump made for political expediency at times where his traditional hostility towards the environment would be deemed unacceptable, such as on *Earth Day*. His half-heartedness and contempt for conservation lurked under the surface. For example, in his statement for *the Land Conversation Bill*, he bungled the pronunciation of the *Yosemite National Park*—one of, if not the most famous national park in the

U.S.—as “yo Semites.” He also exploited this opportunity to exclude Democrats from the bill-signing ceremony so that he could claim all credits to himself and his fellow Republicans (Associated Press, 2020; Karni, 2020).

Despite his occasional expression of wonder and pride in America’s unique natural beauty, abundant resources, and the idea of conservation for future generations, the overwhelming majority of his environmental agendas on energy and natural resources resembled one of extraction rather than conservation. His take on natural resources was reminiscent of Gifford Pinchot’s 19th century “imperial ecology” (Pinchot, 2012) which has long been criticized and rendered obsolete in the environmental field. More importantly, it was shown consistently throughout his career that nature was treated primarily as mere raw materials for America to transfer into economic prosperity and global dominance. This weaves deeply into Trump’s populist framing of the environment with a heavy focus on expanding energy jobs and extraction of natural resources on American soil which are discussed in later sections.

What’s important here, however, is the veneer of positivity that Trump had shown towards the environment and conservation that doesn’t necessarily contradict the populist nature of his environmental agendas. On the contrary, they are powerful examples of how consistent Trump was at anchoring his environmental rhetoric in populist elements such as national pride and appeals to the people, even in pro-environmental gestures that he invested very little in.

1. Environment for the People: Bringing Back American Jobs and Way of Life

It is no secret that Donald Trump, with his populist rhetoric, repeatedly constructed various representations of the people based on sets of very carefully chosen identities designed for different contexts. The people can refer to American citizens when talking about anti-

immigration, working-class Americans when denouncing big businesses and Washington elites, and white Americans when pushing back against BLM movements. In each case, he proved that “the people [in populist rhetoric] could be constructed with ethnic or political criteria, as a plural population or as a unitary actor” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 48).

When it comes to Trump’s populist anti-environmental agendas, the people entailed a few carefully crafted identities in very specific contexts. He primarily appealed to two identities of the people, both closely associated with the economy: average Americans who deserve decent jobs and decent living standards under a strong American economy, and coal miners whose traditional way of living was taken away by pro-environmental policies and globalization.

1.1 Environmental jobs for hardworking Americans

Trump unleashed an untiring populist crusade to dismantle any piece of pro-environmental legislation in order to open up the environment for economic development by private sectors. This agenda was firmly grounded in his populist appeal to the people who desire secure jobs in a strong American economy.

Secure jobs was one of the cornerstones in Trump’s vision to “Make America Great Again” and his promises “made to American people during my campaign for President... cutting job-killing regulation...bringing jobs, plants, and factories back into the United States at numbers which no one until this point thought even possible” (Donald J. Trump, 2017e). His anti-environmental agendas were an extension of this logic. Jobs became almost synonymous with the people. A desirable life for an average American always comes from a secure job that brings stability, dignity, and prosperity to their (most of the time, referring to his) family. To achieve this, Trump’s environmental plans stripped industries of regulatory “burdens,” loosened

environmental standards, opened up land, water, and natural resources for development and job opportunities.

All of these actions were justified on the populist ground, responding to the needs of the American people who share the frustrations of losing old jobs and dignity to globalization and energy transition, and who longed for job security, prosperity, and pride by working for great American businesses that run on American resources. Trump's populist rhetoric skillfully connected this carefully delineated set of identities, frustrations, and desires of the American people with his anti-environmental agendas.

One of the key steps the Trump administration took to dismantle environmental protections was to pull the U.S. out of the Obama administration's major international climate accord, the *Paris Agreement*. He justified this bold move by appealing to the American people who were painted as victims of international treaties and environmental regulations.² Trump incessantly labeled the *Paris Agreement* as a “job-killing” “bad deal” for the average Americans in statements, speeches, and rallies (Donald J. Trump, 2017e, 2017g, 2017h, 2017i, 2017j, 2019d), feeding into the frustration and rage in the crowds. To add credibility to his claims, he cited statistics, “Compliance...could cost America as much as 2.7 million lost jobs by 2025 according to the National Economic Research Associates” and “According to this same study, by 2040...The cost to the economy at this time would be close to \$3 trillion in lost GDP and 6½ million industrial jobs, while households would have \$7,000 less income and, in many cases, much worse than that” (ibid.).

Trump's decision to sever ties with the *Paris Agreement* boosted his image as the leader of the people who sees their grievances and acts for their interests. Trump could not let an

² The nationalistic aspect of this will be discussed in later sections.

international agreement “undermine our economy, hamstringing our workers” (Donald J. Trump, 2017e). He promised, “As President, I can put no other consideration before the well-being of American citizens...The Paris climate accord is...leaving American workers—who I love—and taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production” (Donald J. Trump, 2017e). It became clear that Trump’s decision to disengage with the *Paris Agreement* was less directed toward any specific content of the agreement but stemmed from the populist idea that any deal that risked jeopardizing the American people’s interests is a bad deal. Thus, as the true representative of the people, Trump was more than justified to bail out of this international agreement.

This preoccupation with sustaining American jobs was not just evident in Trump’s rhetoric justifying withdrawal from the *Paris Agreement*, but in various actions he took to deregulate formerly protected natural resources. During each year’s *National Energy Awareness Month*, Trump’s remarks always had a centerpiece along the lines of “unleashing our Nation’s energy potential to drive robust job growth and expansion in every sector of our economy” (Donald J. Trump, 2017d, 2018b, 2019b, 2020c). When Trump challenged 14 states, led by California, that set more stringent tailpipe pollution standards than the federal government, he rallied auto workers by arguing that the federal deregulation would lead to “many more cars will be produced under the new and uniform standard, meaning significantly more JOBS, JOBS, JOBS!” (realdonaldtrump, 2019). Trump unilaterally weakened the *National Environmental Policy Act*, limiting public review of federal infrastructure projects to expedite permit approval processes for freeways, power plants, and pipelines, etc. This infrastructural project was framed as a piece long overdue for the American people which will “strengthen our economic

platform...create millions of jobs, increase wages for American workers, and reduce the costs of goods and services for American families and consumers” (Donald J. Trump, 2017k).

1.2 Coal miners: get your lives back

Workers in the energy sectors, especially the shrinking coal mining communities, formed and sustained strong electoral support for Trump throughout his political career, reciprocating his relentless populist campaign for their nostalgia for their old ways of life. Returning jobs to energy workers was a central part of his campaign rhetoric as he said at a Nashville Rally, “We're going to put our miners back to work. We're going to put our auto industry back to work. Already, because of this new business climate, we are creating jobs that are starting to pour back into our country like we haven't seen in many, many decades” (Donald J. Trump, 2017h).

In the coal community, Trump was very successful at creating and appealing to coal miners’ “heartland,” a uniquely populist term that “represents an idealized conception of the community they serve. It is from this territory of the imagination, that populists construct the ‘people’ as the object of their politics” (Taggart, 2004, p. 274). For coal miners, such “heartland” evoked by Trump was something they’ve lost and longed for in the past decades when their livelihoods, communal life, and shared identity dissipated under strict environmental regulation over coal mining. Reversing previous federal restrictions on coal—what Trump referred to as the “War on Coal”—was a key component of Trump’s anti-environmental agendas since the beginning. His spokesman responded to journalists in 2017 regarding this matter, saying, “Absolutely, I think he made a pledge to the coal industry, and he's going to do whatever he can to help those workers” (Brady, 2017a).

In one of his speeches at a conservative conference in 2017, Trump claimed to protect coal miners by unfolding his larger plans to open up all kinds of natural resources for exploitation. He said, “We're preparing bold action to lift the restrictions on American energy, including shale, oil, natural gas, and beautiful clean coal, and we're going to put our miners back to work. Miners are going back to work. Miners are going back to work, folks. Sorry to tell you that, but they're going back to work” (Donald J. Trump, 2017k). Trump did not hide the supports that coal miners reciprocated to him either, as he said, “I had people in my office—I had miners, and I had farmers, and I had builders building homes. And many of them were tough, strong men and women. And almost all of them were crying. They said, ‘Sir, you've given our life back to us’” (Donald J. Trump, 2019c). Coal miners’ gratitude towards Trump’s anti-environmental agendas further boosted his legitimacy as the populist leader who would go to great lengths to safeguard his constituencies’ ways of life.

This successful mobilization of coal miners through the populist anti-environmental agendas was also captured by Kojola (2019, p. 371) when he argued that “nostalgia for preserving mining as a way of life and anger at outsiders disrupting their livelihoods and extractive moral economy.” The “environmental imaginaries and the social meanings of land, labor, and natural resources” (Kojola, 2019, p. 378) in the mining community were exploited by Trump. He promised these mining communities that they will have their old jobs back and reclaim their “heartland.” As Kojola observed, such populist rhetoric in Trump’s anti-environmental agendas did not just rely on the appeal to the people, it had deep connections with his populist nationalistic and anti-elite appeals as well. The next sections explore these two populist anchors for Trump’s anti-environmental agendas in more detail.

2. Out with Obama: Demolishing Washington Elites' Pro-environmental Legacies

On one hand, Trump's anti-environmental agendas appealed to the pure and hardworking American people by promising job opportunity and their old ways of living. On the other hand, he attributed the abandonment and betrayal felt by these ordinary Americans to the corrupt elites' pro-environmental legislations. Trump brandished his populist rhetoric to declare that he has devoted his anti-environmental agendas to battle the selfish elites for the interests of the ordinary people.

Legislations dismantling Obama-era environmental policies and deregulating the environment were justified by Trump's populism. Previous legislations were portrayed as attempts by Washington elites, bureaucrats, and their special interests to amass power and wealth through excessive regulations at the expense of the people. They were defamed as the culprits of the average Americans' plights whose jobs and old ways of life were sacrificed under the stringent environmental regulations. Trump's core populist rhetoric anchoring his anti-environmental agendas was brilliantly summarized by his 2016 *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece:

"I, for one, am not interested in defending a system that for decades has served the interest of political parties at the expense of the people. Members of the club—the consultants, the pollsters, the politicians, the pundits, and the special interests—grow rich and powerful while the American people grow poorer and more isolated. The only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of popular will. On every major issue affecting this country, the people are right and the governing elite are wrong. The elites are wrong on taxes, on the size of government, on trade, on immigration, on foreign policy. What we are seeing now is not a proper use of

the rules, but a flagrant abuse of the rules. Delegates are supposed to reflect the decisions of voters, but the system is being rigged by party operatives with ‘double-agent’ delegates who reject the decision of voters” (Donald J. Trump, 2016).

This paragraph has all the central anti-elite elements of the populist rhetoric that Trump later employed to frame his anti-environmental agendas: a small group of corrupt elites in power, elites’ self-interested and failed policies, the political system rigged by Washington insiders, the elites’ betrayal of average Americans, and Trump himself as an outsider breaking into the system to set records straight. The following two sub-sections unpack how Trump maneuvered these elements to frame and justify his repertoire of anti-environmental policies as an anti-elite outsider elected to represent the average Americans against the self-interested Washington elites who’s been running the show for too long.

2.1 The corrupt elites in the Obama administration

Many see Trump’s entire campaign as a backlash against Obama and what he stood for. And Trump himself certainly did not shy away from branding his administration as the polar opposite of Obama’s, especially when it came down to their environmental agendas. It has become clear that Trump was obsessed with “dismantle[ing] the Obama Administration’s climate change policies” (Carlson, 2017) with his entire populist rhetorical arsenal.

The Trump administration took every opportunity to roll back environmental policies and to deregulate natural resources, especially those on fossil fuel, put under protection by Obama and previous administrations. For example, Trump pulled out of the *Paris Agreement*, one of the most significant global climate treaties of the past decades, under Obama’s leadership (Friedman, 2019b; Donald J. Trump, 2017e); the Obama-era control on methane, a significantly more potent

greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, was lifted (Davenport, 2020); various restrictions on coal, one of the dirtiest sources of energy, including that on mining and operation of coal plants were loosened or taken away (Friedman, 2019a) via the replacement of Obama's signature *Clean Power Plan* with a much weaker *Affordable Clean Energy Rule* (Irfan, 2019). Trump significantly curtailed previously established environmental review process for infrastructural projects, many of which could be highly environmentally impactful such as pipelines, drilling, and mining projects (Reuters, 2020; Donald J. Trump, 2017a, 2017b). Furthermore, he rolled back the long-standing legislative commitments to clean air and clean water continued by all presidents since the 1970s were rolled back by Trump (Davenport, 2018; Friedman & Davenport, 2019).

Trump challenged the Obama administration with his populist rhetoric to discredit, defame, and vilify them as the elites who trade in what the people really want for the benefit of their co-conspiring elites. James Brady (2017a), the White House Press Secretary under Trump, made it clear in 2017 that "we're not going to do some of the crazy stuff the previous administration did" in terms of climate policies. Trump's Secretary of Energy, James Richard Perry (2017) set a similar tone in a cabinet meeting saying, "We're not going to be held hostage to some Executive order that was ill-thought-out."

After officials set the stage for framing the Obama administration's pro-environmental rule as "crazy" and "ill-thought-out" (Brady, 2017b; Perry, 2017), Trump unleashed an all-front populist war on the environmental policies enacted by Obama and his "elite friends". Of course, the first blow went to the *Paris Agreement*, depicted as "simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States" (Donald J. Trump,

2017e). Immediately following that, Trump delivered an even stronger wave of attacks on Obama's legacies at the national front.

The Obama-led elites were believed to have colluded with foreign powers to undermine American people's interests and to have "waged a relentless war on American energy... They sought to punish our workers, our producers, and manufacturers with ineffective global agreements" (Donald J. Trump, 2019e). Revoking *Waters of the United States Rule*, Trump branded himself as the protector of personal freedom and individual rights. He put out a statement claiming that "no longer will Federal bureaucrats be allowed to micromanage every public pond and drainage ditch on private land. They've taken away your rights. They took away your—they took away your heart" (Donald J. Trump, 2019c).

In specific state-centered cases, such as shrinking two of Utah's national monuments, Trump emphasized the pervasiveness of the infringement on people's rights by the Washington elites even at the state level. He warned, "the natural resources of Utah should not be controlled by a small handful of very distant bureaucrats located in Washington" (Turkewitz, 2017). The Republican Senator of Utah, Mike Lee echoed this populist rhetoric by defending Trump's image as the president of the Utah people and as someone who is "sympathetic to the fact that we've been mistreated...and I'm grateful that he is willing to correct it" (Turkewitz, 2017).

When it came to large-scale infrastructures, previous regulations mandated stringent environmental assessments to regulate projects that could pose serious harm to the environment and local ecology. Yet, Trump labeled these rules as unnecessary and a hindrance to the growth of national energy infrastructure as he said, "For decades, special interest groups, bureaucrats, and radical environmental activists stymied the maintenance, repair, growth, and expansion of our Nation's energy infrastructure, preventing us from achieving energy independence" (Donald

J. Trump, 2020c). Trump added, “The single biggest obstacle to building a modern transportation system has been mountains and mountains of bureaucratic red tape in Washington DC...Together we are reclaiming America’s proud heritage of a nation of builders and a nation that can get things done” (Reuters, 2020). The elites were portrayed as obstacles to the very heart of American nation-building. This stance on infrastructures reinforced Trump’s populist appeal as a leader who could correct elites’ wrongdoings that had alienated the people and endangered national interests.

2.2 Taking your lives back from the elites

Trump was proven to be a successful populist by his ability to stack elements of his populist discourse on top of each other to create an interlocking and coherent populist rhetoric. This interconnectivity between elements of his populist rhetoric was made very explicitly in his attacks on pro-environmental elites. Trump did not defame the elites in isolation, rather he consistently tried to frame their pro-environmental agendas in direct conflict with the interests of ordinary American people.

As shown in previous sections, secure jobs and a strong economy were crucial to Trump’s populist appeal to the people. When Trump was characterizing the failure and damage done by the Washington elites and the Obama administration’s pro-environmental legislations, jobs and the economy had taken a center stage too. In this way, Trump buttressed his own image as the true representative of the people to undo damages imposed on the people by elites and to deliver what the people really want, jobs and a decent life. “The last administration had stifled this industry with one costly job-killing regulation after another” (Donald J. Trump, 2020a) well summarized Trump’s rhetoric on this front.

Trump was particularly fixated on the energy sector, a foundational piece in his deregulatory policies. He justified his actions by saying that “the previous administration waged a relentless war on American energy... These radical plans would not make the world cleaner; they would just make and put Americans out of work, and they put them out of work rapidly” (Donald J. Trump, 2019f). The loss of energy jobs, especially for coal miners, was depicted as the result of the “relentless assault from the previous administration... More than a third of all of the coal mining jobs had vanished” (Donald J. Trump, 2019c). Moreover, such assault was also a direct consequence of “federal regulations and bureaucrats [who] were working around the clock” to obstruct coal leases, drilling, mining, and energy infrastructure projects (ibid.).

Trump was not afraid to bring fire to specific states either. He particularly used this populist rhetoric to appeal to his supporters in Pennsylvania where he accused the last administration of killing its coal and fracking industry, the source of nostalgia and pride in its rural communities. He alluded to miners’ lost way of life to manufacturing jobs under pro-environmental regulations by saying that “I don't know what the hell you're going to do. You don't want to make widgets, right?” (Donald J. Trump, 2019c).

In addition to the heavy emphasis on jobs, another way through which Trump showed his advocacy for the average Americans against the elites was to build a strong economy that had been prevented to grow by pro-environmental regulations. He loved quoting numbers, especially the economic costs of previous legislations to prove that his plans are superior and more beneficial for the people. For example, he claimed that Obama’s *Clean Power Plan* “would have cost Americans nearly \$40 billion a year and caused electricity prices to soar to double digits, while cutting coal production by almost 250 million tons” (ibid.) if he didn’t step up on behalf of the people to shut it down.

Trump did not miss any chance to attack the *Paris Agreement*, and economic numbers gave him ample support to do so as he quoted in the official statement for *Paris Agreement* withdrawal:

“Compliance with the terms of the Paris...could cost America as much as 2.7 million lost jobs by 2025 according to the National Economic Research Associates. According to this same study, by 2040, compliance with the commitments put into place by the previous administration would cut production for the following sectors: paper, down 12 percent; cement, down 23 percent; iron and steel, down 38 percent; coal—and I happen to love the coal miners—down 86 percent; natural gas, down 31 percent. The cost to the economy at this time would be close to \$3 trillion in lost GDP and 6½ million industrial jobs, while households would have \$7,000 less income and, in many cases, much worse than that” (Donald J. Trump, 2017e).

The Democrats were a frequent subject of Trump’s attacks. He painted them as a party ran by the elites and out of touch with the people. He was particularly fond of attacking their *Green New Deal* proposal. Here again, he cited economic numbers and predicted job losses to back his claims, “Their plan is estimated to cost our economy nearly \$100 trillion, a number unthinkable...kill millions of jobs; it will crush the dreams of the poorest Americans and disproportionately harm minority communities...we will defend American sovereignty, American prosperity, and we will defend American jobs” (Donald J. Trump, 2019e). Not surprisingly, this partisan attack circled back to the Democratic support for *Paris Agreement* where “two hundred and twenty-eight House Democrats voted to put America back into the disastrous Paris climate accord. How's that working out for Paris? How's that one working out

for France? The yellow vests. They didn't like [it]...it hasn't been working out well” (Donald J. Trump, 2019b).

In addition, Trump did refer to the *Yellow Vest* movement in France that protested against Macron’s policy to raise fuel tax for conservation. This movement was openly backed by his French right-wing populist counterpart *National Rally*. In this instance, it was clear that Trump could bring a range of evidence to support his populist anti-environmental agendas as long as they prove his point that the people’s interests have been ignored and sacrificed for the Washington elites’ self-interested pro-environmental legislations.

3. “America First”: Energy Independence and Global Leadership

The final populist anchor of Trump’s environmental agendas was in line with his vigorous branding of American nationalism, captured by his slogan “Make America Great Again.” Trump had adopted numerous hostile foreign policies and restricted immigration of all sorts. His right-wing nationalistic “America First” doctrine was one of the guiding principles for his foreign policymaking. Trump made no exceptions in his nationalistic campaign to govern strictly within the national borders even for the environment, a universally recognized global issue.

Trump withdrew from many international environmental agreements and partnerships, among which included the *Paris Agreement* which has been discussed at length in previous sections. Rhetorically, Trump seized every opportunity to blame environmental problems on other countries, especially the emerging power of China and leading powers in Europe, while glorifying the great American environment. His administration rolled back a series of environmental protections to open up the energy reservoir, especially that of fossil fuel within

the U.S. as a backbone for his pursuit of energy sovereignty. All these actions were anchored in the nationalistic populist rhetoric of energy sovereignty, resource nationalism, and pride in America's great environment and its global leadership.

3.1 "America First": the paramount energy sovereignty

Centered on his nationalistic and populist principle of "America First," one of Trump's major goals on the environmental front was to pursue energy sovereignty. Energy sovereignty was also identified as a key dimension of resource nationalism commonly found in populist parties' anti-environmental agendas (e.g. Andreucci, 2018; Koch & Perreault, 2018; Lyall & Valdivia, 2019). Energy sovereignty is an umbrella term pertaining to two elements of Trump's populist anti-environmental agendas, including a secure national frontier/border, and energy independence secured by access to the rich reservoir of natural resources on American soil.

The rhetoric on securing the American frontier was evident in Trump's framings around the state's oceanic frontier. In his annual remarks for the *Ocean Awareness Month*, themes of national security, safeguarding resources, economic independence and competitiveness were stressed repeatedly in ways like "We must recognize the importance of our offshore areas to our security and economic independence, all while protecting the marine environment for present and future generations" (Donald J. Trump, 2017c); "By exploring, developing, and conserving the ocean resources of our great Nation, we will augment our economic competitiveness, enhance our national security, and ensure American prosperity" (Donald J. Trump, 2018a); "Our ocean and coastal waterways are essential to our national security... global competitiveness, and transportation... have the potential to promote economic prosperity, create jobs, and strengthen our maritime and homeland security for current and future generations of Americans" (Donald J.

Trump, 2020b). The ocean, as the outermost border of the U.S., was given a symbolic role in Trump's environmental rhetoric as an important frontier to his overall goal of national security, energy sovereignty, and global competitiveness.

The expansion of resource extraction enabled by Trump's deregulation policies was at the core of U.S. energy sovereign and self-sufficiency. One major action taken by the Trump administration on this front was opening up oil exploration in previously protected areas. One of these areas was the Alaska refuge's coastal plain along the Beaufort Sea. It was believed to contain the largest untapped onshore oil reserve in North America (Fountain & Eder, 2018). The administration's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Casey Hammond supported this action, saying that it "is a significant achievement in delivering on our commitment to provide energy for America, from America" (BLM Alaska, 2021). It was consistent with the Press Secretary's earlier comment about energy policies that aimed at "keeping with President Trump's desire to make the United States energy independent" (Brady, 2017a).

Partnership with fossil fuel companies was critical to Trump's vision of energy sovereignty. On this matter, Trump personally addressed *Shell Pennsylvania Chemicals Plant*, praising their efforts in expanding natural gas fracking to provide a stable supply of gas-generated electricity to American households as opposed to wind farms that "destroy everybody's property values, kill all the birds" (Donald J. Trump, 2019e). In Trump's own words, it was about making sure that "we are no longer beholden to foreign powers or domestic radicals. We are powering our Nation on our own terms" (Donald J. Trump, 2020c) and "to freeing our Nation from reliance on the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) cartel and to helping our friends and allies overseas reduce their dependence on those who seek

to use energy as a weapon. An energy dominant America is good for Americans -- and good for the world” (Donald J. Trump, 2017d).

Lying behind the idea of energy sovereignty was a strong antagonistic view towards other countries who were perceived as potential enemies capable of undermining the United States by holding its energy supplies hostage. This view was consistent with Trump’s overall xenophobic and aggressively nationalistic populism where he thrived on vilifying other countries as potential threats to justify retreats from international collaborations by putting American interests above everything else.

3.2 American global dominance & international rivals

The *Paris Agreement* took the most heat under Trump as the signature international agreement he single-handedly pulled the U.S. out of. This move was framed in a number of ways to align with his nationalistic populist agenda. The treaty was portrayed as hurting the U.S. disproportionately while letting other countries run loose from the same obligations. “The Paris Agreement handicaps the United States economy in order to win praise from the very foreign capitals and global activists that have long sought to gain wealth at our country's expense...it would only punish our country while foreign polluters operate with impunity” (Donald J. Trump, 2017e, 2017f). Trump withdrew from the *Paris Agreement* because he is different from the politician under the Obama administration who “don't put America first. [But] I do, and I always will” (Donald J. Trump, 2017e). He further exaggerated its potential harms on the basis of national security as it was believed to expose the U.S. to “future intrusions on the United States sovereignty and massive future legal liability” (Donald J. Trump, 2017e). Therefore, “to protect

those jobs and the sovereignty and freedom of the United States, I followed through on my promise to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord” (Donald J. Trump, 2017l).

By painting this picture of America under surge from foreign powers, Trump set the stage to frame himself as the only president strong enough to stand up to foreign powers to protect American interests. This image was seconded by Mandy Gunasekara, a former senior adviser under Trump when she claimed that people view a global agreement led by the United Nations as an infringement on American sovereignty, and leaving the *Paris Agreement* “is celebrated by your average Trump supporter” (Friedman, 2019b).

Aside from the *Paris Agreement*, Trump strived to assert American dominance in any possible scenario as a way to fulfill his populist promise of “Making America Great Again.” He enjoyed showing U.S. superiority by comparing itself with other countries such as China and India. When it came to pollution, Donald J. Trump (2017e) said, “You look at China, you look at India, you look at Russia, you look at so many other places, their smokestacks are pouring out. Everything is pouring out. And I want to be clean. And we're going to be clean.” He hence could claim that the U.S. had proudly committed to cleaner air and less pollution than its rival countries. Connecting with earlier points about his pride in U.S.’s natural resource reservoir, Trump contrasted U.S. and China. He said, “We're lucky. You go to places like China, they don't have oil and gas. They don't have it under their—they have to go buy it...that costs them a fortune to go out and buy it. They hurt themselves in the long run...But we have this unbelievable—the greatest in the world...now we're the number-one—think of it, as I said—the number-one energy producer in the world” (Donald J. Trump, 2019e).

This pride in America’s natural resources was later used to justify the administration’s big move to significantly shorten the process for environmental assessment on infrastructural

projects so that more of these amazing natural resources could be opened to extraction. They were believed to sustain America's global competitiveness and dominance in the global energy field. In the official document for this legislation, the first bullet of the stated purpose in Section 1 included "increased infrastructure investment to strengthen our economy, enhance our competitiveness in world trade" (Donald J. Trump, 2017b). Similarly, Martin Durbin, the president of the *U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Energy Institute* put it as "a big step forward and it's about our nation maintaining its global competitiveness" (Friedman, 2020). Therefore, the Trump administration's nationalistic populist grounds for sustaining American competitiveness and dominance provided ample justification for his anti-environmental agendas on resource extraction and deregulation.

VI. Right-wing, Pro-environment Party: National Rally under Marine Le Pen in France

In this chapter, we turn to another right-wing populist party that has been under the spotlight in the past decade. It took the opposite approach to the environment from that of the GOP. This chapter investigates the unusual pro-environmental agendas of France's right-wing populist party National Rally (*Rassemblement National*, abbreviated as RN) —formerly known as National Front (*Front National*)—under the leadership of Marine Le Pen. Since 2014, RN stood out as one of the few leading right-wing populist parties in the world that have steered toward an outright positive stance on environmental issues.

This chapter begins with an overview of RN's populist campaign and pro-environmental agendas under the leadership of Le Pen. The following three sections are introduced and later expanded, each focusing on a distinctive feature of RN's populist pro-environmental agenda.

Overview: National Rally, Populism, and Pro-environmental Agendas

The French right-wing populist party RN has been a serious contender in French politics, especially in the most recent decade. RN's strong presence in French politics and Le Pen's nearly successful 2017 presidential campaign made it a leading example of the recent right-wing populist surge in Europe. The party primes itself on a staunchly nationalistic platform to defend the French people and the historical French principles of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” (Marine Le Pen, 2017b) against “invasions” from foreign cultures. RN also runs on a clear anti-elite and anti-globalization (especially anti-EU as it explicitly supports Frexit) platform. It denounces globalization which is seen as political and economic elites' proxy to amass personal gains at the expense of the French public's wellbeing. RN brands itself as the alternative to the elites, calling for a “revolution of proximity, local before global.” This motto ties in neatly with RN's

promotion of nationalism as Le Pen repeatedly vouches to protect “one language, one culture” within the “one [French] national community” (Sandford, 2017).

In 2014, when most far-right populist parties in Europe were preoccupied with campaigning against the Greens for electoral support, RN took an expected turn by launching a pro-environmental campaign: the *New Ecology (Nouvelle écologie)* movement. This *New Ecology* movement claimed to present a “patriotic” and “realistic” response to climate change (Nadal, 2021), and a localized alternative to “ineffective” international climate governance. Since then, RN pushed for various pro-environmental agendas in its campaign. Pro-environmental elements were notable in Le Pen’s *144 Presidential Commitments* during her 2017 presidential race (Marine Le Pen, 2017a), had an active presence on RN websites in the form of *New Ecology Collective (Collectif Nouvelle Ecologie)* press releases, and centered RN’s counter-proposal *15 Questions for Environment, Counter-project Referendum (15 Questions Sur L’Environnement, Conter-Project de Référendum)* against Macron’s environmental plan in 2021 (Rassemblement National, 2021).

The following sections unpack how RN’s pro-environmental agendas are firmly anchored in its populist rhetoric. They are rooted in three populist elements of RN’s campaign: 1). Nationalism, feeding the anti-globalization and anti-EU sentiments by promoting local and patriotic solutions to environmental problems; 2). Anti-elitism, denouncing the existing political and economic elites while branding RN as the political alternative; and 3). People-centricity, making its pro-environmental policies responsive to the demands and interests of ordinary French citizens, especially at the local level.

Each of the following three sections highlights one general populist feature of RN's rhetoric, and then analyzes their applications in RN's pro-environmental agendas. The first section is divided into three sub-sections and the other two remain un-divided.

To arrive at this understanding, evidence is drawn from RN's official statements, announcements and press releases, RN's legislative proposals, Le Pen and key party officials' speeches on environmental issues, and closely related secondary sources.

1. Patriotic Ecology: Anti-globalization, Anti-EU, and French "Eco-nationalism"

The central political conflict of the time, according to Le Pen, is "no longer put the right and left in opposition, but patriots and globalists" (Sandford, 2017). Le Pen's populist rhetoric is deeply rooted in nationalistic and anti-globalization sentiments. She openly denounced her opponents who support globalization, claiming that "they've made an ideology out of it. An economic globalism which rejects all limits, all regulation of globalization, and which consequently weakens the immune defenses of the nation state, dispossessing it of its constituent elements: borders, national currency, the authority of its laws and management of the economy, thus enabling another globalism to be born and to grow: Islamist fundamentalism" (Sandford, 2017). Le Pen brought the much-needed counterforce to protect the French nation when France was under surge from the virulent forces of globalization.

This patriotic and anti-globalization rhetoric informed, shaped, and supported Le Pen's pro-environmental agendas. Le Pen branded them as patriotic in nature. Yet, they were equally, if not more, defined by the outward enemies RN claimed to rescue the French nation from, such as international organizations, the EU, and other powerful countries. Along these lines, RN

pushed for pro-environmental agendas based on the principle of “nationalistic green localism,” and opposed to any global climate governance.

1.1 Hervé Juvin and logic of “nationalistic green localism”

The architect of RN’s unique strand of patriotic local environmentalism was Hervé Juvin, a public intellectual serving as an RN MEP in the European Parliament and a representative of the French region *Pays de la Loire* (Baleo, 2019; Nadal, 2021). He coined the term “nationalistic green localism” centered on the idea that “environmentalism [is] the natural child of patriotism” (Milman, 2021). RN adopted this principle as the basis for its pro-environmental agendas. It is essentially populist because RN adopted it to justify itself as the defendant for the ordinary French people’s way of life against corruptions from neoliberal globalization that had long been promoted by international organizations and other elite French parties.

RN followed Juvin (2019) to denounce “the globalist swindle that hides behind the climate alert campaign” and vouched to reclaim the true ecology which “is a matter of local, singularities, and collective choices” within the French border. In the same speech, Juvin claimed that “only States in full possession of their territories can control, manage, and limit the activities of companies or their populations. Only Nations that guarantee the borders and identity of their people can preserve their culture, their civilization, and the difference in their way of life” (ibid.). What’s at stake here was not only the French way of life and culture but more importantly, French national sovereignty and democracy which are prerequisites for the former. When the globalists asserted that “since climate change does not stop at borders, the solutions are global and can only come from global organizations that do not know borders nor the sovereignty of

States, nor democracy!” (Juvin, 2019), Juvin and RN painted them as dangerous threats to the essence of the French nation.

Juvin’s “nationalistic green localism” successfully weaved the core of RN’s populist elements into its pro-environmental agendas to form a coherent narrative, merging two fronts that were previously believed to be incompatible with each other. French patriotism and nationalism, national borders as legislative boundaries, and preservation of French culture and its way of life all became part of this patriotic ecological movement. RN’s pro-environmental agendas, hence, rested on the idea that the French local environment can only be managed and preserved by French people and local French businesses, free from international interference, and supported by a patriotic party that understands these principles, the RN.³

1.2 Anti-globalization and anti-EU: globalists’ failure to protect the environment for the French people

Carrying out the classic populist strategy of creating the dichotomy of power struggles between the pure people and their enemies, RN went to great lengths to construct the enemies who are at odds with RN’s nationalistic environmental agendas. These enemies are the globalists who have dominated the political arena with their favorable stances towards globalization and the EU. Le Pen brilliantly summarized this central “us v. them” dichotomy in the opening statement of her *144 Presidential Commitments*:

“This presidential election will bring two visions face to face. The ‘globalist’ choice on the one hand, represented by all my competitors, which seeks to destroy our great

³ Section 3 will continue and expand the analysis of the localist aspects of RN’s pro-environmental rhetoric.

economic and social balances, which wants the abolition of all borders, both economic and physical, and which wants ever more immigration and less cohesion between the French. The patriotic choice of the other, which I embody in this election, which puts the defense of the nation and the people at the heart of all public decisions and which above all wants the protection of our national identity, our independence, the unity of the French, social justice and prosperity for all” (Marine Le Pen, 2017a, p. 2).

In the speech for her presidential campaign launch, Le Pen made it clear that local sustainability and environmental friendliness are inseparable from RN’s anti-global populist agenda. She promised to bring “the second revolution we need...the revolution of proximity local before global...We want a sustainable economy for France we can achieve the relocation of our production by a reasonable and calculated use of economic protectionism and by applying economic patriotism; these are normal economic tools although they are currently prohibited by the European Union” (Marine Le Pen, 2017b).

In order to achieve this goal of a localist sustainable economy, RN launched a fierce campaign against any act of global governance, especially those involving the EU. The most important climate treaty of the decade, the *Paris Agreement*, was undoubtedly under fire. Juvin (2019) denounced the *Paris Agreement* as “a symbol of the impotence of the great globalist machines that the failure of the *Paris Agreement* (2015) despite the resounding communiqués, whose objectives will not be kept, and most of the participants do not even hold the desired direction!” RN claimed that international treaties could never achieve the goals they desire because of their unwillingness to halt international free trade. RN considered global free trade a major contributor to climate change because it “push the lowest environmental bidder and increase the pollution linked to transport” (Marine Le Pen, 2017c). According to RN “the

reduction of greenhouse gases would in fact be increased tenfold if we agreed to call into question an economic model of globalized free trade, which is structurally bad for the environment,” and therefore bad for French people (Front National, 2015).

In addition to the inherent inability of international treaties to address what RN sees as the root of environmental problems—global free trade—it also antagonized international organizations. EU was their primary target, vilified for its ineffective, technocratic, and bureaucratic environmental governance. This corrupt international governance model was imposed on countries like France. In a *New Ecology Collective* press release objecting to the Kigali Agreement, RN explicated this logic by saying that “we are opposed to ineffective and dangerous supranational mechanisms, where decisions and actions are imposed from above on nations and therefore on peoples” (Collectif Nouvelle Ecologie, 2016a).

RN also took every opportunity to catch the EU’s failed attempts to protect the environment, proving its incompetency at addressing environmental problems at the super-national level. On EU’s belated action on banning bee-killing pesticides, RN “denounce[d] the deadly deficiencies of the Brussels technocracy” and claimed “this ban is a salvation for professionals but the damage to our ecosystems is immense and partly irreversible” (Odoul, 2018). It highlighted the EU’s failure in enforcing strict diesel standards as a sign of corruption from “the disproportionate weight of lobbies in the decisions of the European Commission...The European Commission knew, the European Commission lied and did not protect the Europeans. Worse, the European Commission continues to lie” (Collectif Nouvelle Ecologie, 2015b). And, in the case of regulating endocrine disruptors, since the French Minister of the Environment Ségolène Royal “considers the definition of endocrine disruptors presented by the European Commission to be ‘unacceptable.’ It became clear that the protection of living

organisms and consumers cannot be achieved within the framework of the European Union” (Philippe Murer & Richermoz, 2016).

In all these cases, RN employed a classic populist dichotomy to portray the EU as the enemy of the French people on environmental matters. Using this antagonistic framework, RN took every opportunity to show the incompetency and ineffectiveness of the technocratic international governance model. In addition, participants of international treaties were also treated as puppets of special interests to cripple French values and undermine the interests of the French people.

1.3 In defense of France: calling for patriotic ecology

Denouncing international climate actions as ineffective and corrupt was in the common right-wing populist parties’ playbook. However, what’s special about RN’s environmental agendas was that it took a step further from simply denouncing international climate actions as useless and ineffective. RN proposed its own solutions to environmental problems based on its principle of patriotic ecology, as Jordan Bardella, the head of RN’s European election candidates list put it, “Borders are the environment’s greatest ally; it is through them that we will save the planet” (Mazoue, 2019).

RN introduced its own version of patriotic climate action, inspired by Juvin’s “nationalistic green localism” and in fierce opposition to any international governance. As Juvin (2019) laid out, the internal logic of this patriotic environmentalism is that “we will refuse any provision that, under the guise of a good green conscience, would undermine the customs, traditions, craft practices and the agricultural or gastronomic way of doing things in France.”

The *New Ecology* movement was crafted under such a framework. An RN environmental committee member and MEP Mireille d'Ornano said that “the *New Ecology* movement is based on national interest and patriotism. We have to be closer to our people and not against our country’s interests” (Neslen, 2014). One of the cornerstones of RN’s environmental agendas was the promotion of nuclear power as they framed it as a matter of “national sovereignty,” of the “nation's energy independence,” and the best energy source to secure national control over energy generation (Collectif Nouvelle Ecologie, 2016b; Marine Le Pen, 2017a; Maréchal Le Pen & Collard, 2014).

In Le Pen’s *144 Presidential Commitments*, she proposed a considerable number of sustainability measures in section VII titled “A Sustainable France.” They were founded on the principle of patriotic ecology with explicit references to “economic patriotism” (Marine Le Pen, 2017a). In the sub-section “France, An Agricultural Power At The Service Of Healthy Food,” Le Pen called for “apply[ing] economic patriotism to French agricultural products in order to immediately support our farmers and fishermen,” “transform[ing] the Common Agricultural Policy into a French Agricultural Policy,” and “ban[ing] the import of agricultural and food products that do not respect French production standards” (Marine Le Pen, 2017a). She aimed at transforming French agriculture into a nationalistic, local-based, protectionist sector and applying environmental standards that are only specifically crafted to fit the French agricultural sector. In the sub-section “Environment And Energy Transition: France Must Aim For Excellence,” promises on nationalistic and local ecology were made “to preserve the environment, break with the economic model based on the unbridled globalization,” and to “massively develop the French renewable energy sectors (solar, biogas, wood...) through intelligent protectionism, economic patriotism” (Marine Le Pen, 2017a).

To replace the ineffective and harmful international climate governance, RN presented its own counter-projects based on nationalistic ideals. On the EU's belated action on banning bee-killing pesticides, RN "reaffirms that the effective and sustainable safeguarding of biodiversity requires the reclaiming of the sovereignty of each nation" (Odoul, 2018). On diesel regulations, RN proposed to abandon the EU standard since "it is time for a French public agency...to see the light of day and be the only one to control the level of pollution emitted by vehicles sold in France, to authorize their marketing" (Collectif Nouvelle Ecologie, 2015b). Defending its Brexit agenda while denouncing the EU's unsafe standards on endocrine disruptors, RN called for "tak[ing] back our sovereignty to protect our citizens with regulations that serve their interests and not those of 'agribusiness' multinationals...Yes, ecology goes through Brexit!" When it comes to *Nexcis*, a French start-up innovating photovoltaic renewable energy met by fierce global competition, RN voiced its unwavering support for *Nexcis* as a "French initiative, French genius, and patriotic ecology" (Collectif Nouvelle Ecologie, 2015a). Therefore "for the employment, independence, and climate protection, we [RN] therefore call for a *New Ecology*, revolutionary since it is patriotic, proud, and courageous in the challenges ahead" (ibid.). All these initiatives and rhetoric employed by RN show a consistent populist anchoring of its pro-environmental agendas in its populist anti-globalization and anti-EU rhetoric. RN also pushed for various alternative proposals and initiatives in response to the failure of globalization and Europeanization. RN was able to package its alternative environmental policies in the form of populist, nationalistic, and local ecology. It was a continuation of its populist appeal as the only French party genuinely representing and advocating for the interests of the French people against threats to the French way of life from the imposition of international technocratic environmental governance.

2. Say No to “Professor Macron” and Corporate Interests: A Party for People’s Ecology

Paralleling with RN’s strong anti-globalization and anti-EU rhetoric, another group of enemies central to its populist framing is the corrupt elites who sustain and benefit from the nation’s political and economic status quo. Two groups were particularly under fire from RN’s populist pro-environmental rhetoric: Macron and other dominant political parties in France, and corporate elites both at home and abroad.

The core of any populist rhetoric is pitting the pure people against corrupt elites. In many cases, the corrupt elites refer to some form of the existing political establishment, parties in power, or current political leaders. For RN, this is not an exception. RN was particularly critical of Macron and his administration, especially during Le Pen’s presidential campaign in 2017 when she was competing head-to-head against Macron. Le Pen’s loath for the political establishment was evident in her presidential campaign launch speech where she said, “The candidates, either left-wing or right-wing, but both guided by financial interests, I am the candidate of the people” (Marine Le Pen, 2017b). An iconic populist moment to brand herself as the candidate of the people as opposed to those representing elite special interests.

One of the easiest ways for Le Pen to criticize the current establishment on the environmental front was to connect such criticism with RN’s anti-globalization rhetoric, claiming any international agreement signed by the current administration as a betrayal of the French people for their own selfish gains. For example, Emmanuelle Cosse, the National Secretary of the EELV for France, was accused by Le Pen in a 2014 televised debate on BFMTV of “promoting a profoundly anti-ecological model through the European Union and the absence of borders” (Martin, 2014). Immediately following that, Le Pen presented her newly crafted nationalistic *New Ecology* movement as an alternative for the people. During the same time

when RN was pushing for its *New Ecology* agenda, it vilified the Green party. RN's general secretary, Nicolas Bay, stated that "they have managed to make us, the very people who are so attached to the flora, fauna, and landscapes of our beautiful country, hate political environmentalism" (Machin & Wagener, 2019). By delegitimizing other parties' environmental agendas, RN set itself apart as the only party that can act according to the French people's interests.

The *New Ecology Collective* press release on RN's official website had always been a powerful campaign tool for RN to express its contempt for other parties' environmental policies while branding its own proposals as the only genuinely people-centered environmental solutions. The current administration's regulations over private automobiles and the promotion of public transportations were under storm. RN decried legislators who ignored the need to reform Paris's old metro and RER systems which were believed by RN as the real culprits of fine-partial pollution in Paris. "Madame Hidalgo [mayor of Paris], a great bobo ideologue" was accused of being "on a crusade against diesel and the automobile in general" where "this major problem of pollution in the subways does not seem to concern the socialists who have a selective indignation at the pollution" (Philippe Murer & Richermoz, 2015). Along the same lines, Christophe Najdovski, Mayor Hidalgo's deputy in charge of travel was portrayed as aloof and out of touch with the people when he supported the promotion of public transportation in Paris. RN mocked his detachment from the people by saying, "Mr. Najdovski lives off the grid, in an imaginary country" (de Saint-just, 2015).

Another example would be legislations restricting hunter activities to protect biodiversity. RN used the same populist framework to say that "the actors of the territories have been excluded from the discussions that concern them primarily. Such a process shows the contempt

of the government and the Greens for our fellow citizens in rural areas... The ‘ecologist’ deputies...make their sectarianism triumph by destroying the hunting activity and its traditions” (M. M. Le Pen, 2015). In this case, not only were the political elites out of touch with the people, RN also implied the dysfunctionality of the political system which enabled this unilateral political decision to be made in the first place, without any consultation with the people affected. And RN, as a political alternative with its localist principles, would ensure future decisions “to be taken as close as possible to the citizens and directly controlled by them” as Le Pen (2017a) promised in her *144 Presidential Commitments*.

During the *Yellow Vest* movement in 2018, French citizens took the streets to voice grievances against the government’s newly imposed tax on fuel and crude oil. The protests grew and morphed into demonstrations against economic inequality, high cost of living, and unresponsiveness from the government to grassroots demands. This was the perfect populist crowd for RN to appeal to. Le Pen and RN publicly supported protesters, framing fuel taxation as “punitive environmentalism” promoted by a bohemian bourgeois elite in Paris who “shut in their pretty offices with nice moldings on their ceiling and absolutely no connection to the situation of our compatriots” (Higgins, 2018). The Macron administration was criticized as again, out of touch with the ordinary people when he mistakenly “believes them to be [lazy], [while they are nothing] but poor workers, admirable single mums and needy pensioners” (La Tribune, 2019).

Jorden Bardella, the young candidate leading RN’s list for the European elections, stood up to criticize the “great false debate” which was “completely locked down” by “interminable lectures orchestrated by professor Macron” (ibid.) who kept justifying environmental goals at the expense of ordinary citizens’ interests. Le Pen denounced taxation on diesel “because it is the lower classes who will be the direct victims” (Bauduin, 2017). Le Pen’s own environmentally

sound alternatives proposed that "the State must invest massively in the search for hydrogen cars", which she believed to be the "cleanest" vehicles out there (ibid.).

Another group of French elites that was targeted by RN was the corporate/economic elites who have been making an enormous amount of profit under the current administration. One way that the economic elites undermined the interests of ordinary French people was by taking advantage of pro-environmental policies. Juvin (2019) believed that "too often, the ecological requirement is diverted to the benefit of multinationals and dominant players, simply because of the complexity of the rules and standards."

These economic profiteers were also everywhere in the EU. "The financial world [is] rubbing its hands at the idea of the hundreds of billions that the [European] Union is committed to spending on objectives that are as uncertain as they are distant - the commissions of the financial intermediaries will be very real, as will the incomes of the NGOs and agencies that will award them their certificate of good ecological conduct!" (Juvin, 2019). In this case, the government bureaucrats, technocrats, and corporate elites operate like a revolving door at both the national and international levels to make environmental legislations inaccessible to the ordinary people so that they can benefit personally in the name of the environment. In response, Le Pen promised in her *144 Presidential Commitments* that she will put an end to this practice, "I also want to give the French people their money back, because for too many years, our social and fiscal policies have impoverished the middle and working classes, while enriching the multinationals and squandering public money" (Marine Le Pen, 2017a, p. 2).

3. Environment with Borders: French Environment for French People Only

Last but not least, after setting up both globalizing powers and national elites as enemies of the people, RN seized the opportunity to bring the populist narrative to a full circle with direct appeals to the virtuous people. The people's interests were sacrificed by the governing elites, but will be redeemed once RN is in power.

In Le Pen's pivotal 2017 presidential campaign launch speech, she declared, "I am the candidate of the people" and "No French person, no part of France... must be forgotten" (Marine Le Pen, 2017a, p. 2). To support that, she promised that RN "want[s] every French citizen... to feel supported by the national community and by a careful and benevolent state. We want a strong state, we want a state that plays a strategic role in the economy and who could blame us for it is you the people who embody the state and what the state is, the instrument to fulfill your will" (Marine Le Pen, 2017b). Le Pen essentially promised to put the state, under her and RN if the campaign was successful, directly at the service of the people.

This idea of people-centrality anchored RN's environmental agendas in two ways. The first was direct and explicit, translated into RN's promises to convert people's will into environmental policies. Previous sections touched on instances where RN countered political enemies and showed direct support for the people on environmental issues, such as backing the *Yellow Vest* movement, denouncing international treaties and the EU's negligence of French people's interest, and proposing alternative policies for people's interests in areas of air pollution and hunting rights. In RN's 2021 *Counter-project Referendum* on ecology, a list of fifteen questions was proposed "to be decided by the French people, the proposed law to organize this consultation and the proposed constitutional law to translate the results of the popular vote on ecology" (Durand, 2021; Rassemblement National, 2021, p. 3). This was an attempt by RN to

root for direct democracy of the people on ecological matters. Such emphasis on direct democracy was also shown in RN's statements scolding Macron's *General State of the Food* where "ordinary French people - individuals, associations - in short, 'sixty million consumers' were left out of the discussion on structuring subjects of food, to improve its quality and cost, all in the service of relocated employment and respect of our environment" (Collectif Nouvelle Ecologie, 2017). RN promised its own version of "a French Agricultural Policy" to consult with and protect the interests of French farmers.

The second way in which RN's environmental policies were tailored toward the people was more implicit and rested on the principle of "a human ecology." Juvin (2019) put it as "the political ecology that we propose is first and foremost a human ecology, which places in the foreground the respect of peoples and their diversity, diversity of customs, beliefs and traditions, of political regimes, diversity of economic, legal and social systems." This seemingly inclusive framework was bounded by national borders. The traditions, customs and people referred to in Juvin's statement were under a nationalistic context. In the same speech, Juvin (2019) went on to explain that "authentic ecologists are those Europeans rooted in a region, a city, a village, who are from somewhere, and who want to remain at home" and "ecology is a matter of local, singularities, and collective choices." This localist ecology was envisioned to take the form of direct democracy of the people in different French regions to make the best decisions for their homeland. This vision was usually discussed in the context of anti-globalization and the *New Ecology* movement, as shown in previous sections.

One practical example of this pro-environmental, people-centered localism can be found in the city of *Hénin-Beaumont*. The city implemented LED bulbs for all street and building lights, gave free trees for homeowners to shield against heat waves, and built a field dedicated to

the “eco-grazing” of sheep (Onishi, 2019). All of these environmentally-friendly changes were implemented by RN members in the city administrations, as a pioneering example to show how responsive, people-based environmental solutions look like under the RN framework.

Christopher Szczurek, a deputy mayor of *Hénin-Beaumont* and a member of RN’s national board commented that “for a long time, political parties took ahold of ecology and aimed it only at the bourgeois and well-off. and now we see that the working class can also find something of real interest in it” (Onishi, 2019). This city’s project homed in on the idea of RN being a party for the ordinary people by crafting and implementing people-centered environmental solutions close to their homes.

VII. Left-wing, Pro-environment Party: Podemos under Pablo Iglesias in Spain

In Southwestern Europe, another country's populist party also campaigned on pro-environmental agendas. This chapter focuses on Spain's progressive, breakthrough left-wing populist party Podemos (meaning "We Can") during its prominent years between 2014 and 2021. Podemos had two major environmental initiatives incorporated into its political campaign and leveraged its populist pro-environmental platforms to attract predominantly young voters. I found the lowest number of sources regarding its environmental agendas among the four cases, partly as a result of its dwindling support in later years, the limited number of environmental issues it focused on, its over-generalized proposals, and it being the most moderate party among the four in terms of campaign rhetoric.

This chapter begins with an overview of Podemos' rise and fall as a breakthrough populist party in Spain, and then goes into summarizing its pro-environmental agendas. Following the overview, two sections are introduced and later expanded, each focusing on a distinctive feature of Podemos' populist pro-environmental agenda.

Overview: Podemos, Populism, and Pro-environmental Agendas

Podemos, a left-wing populist party, grabbed the spotlight as a rapidly rising disruptor in Spanish politics in the 2010s. Created from the indigenous anti-austerity movement (15-M movement) in 2011, Podemos was led by former political science professor Pablo Iglesias who borrowed extensively from Laclau's theory of populism (Barriere, Durgan, & Robson, 2015; Hancox, 2015). The anti-corruption sentiments and grievances towards the failure of the 1978 constitutional settlement during the 15-M movement were carried on by Podemos as a central component of its left-wing populist rhetoric. Podemos branded itself as serving the "popular

unity and citizenship” to reclaim sovereignty and democracy that was held hostage by the oligarchic “caste,” and to hand them back to the Spanish people (Errejón, 2014).

Carrying over its strong populist platform and mass support from the 15-M movement, Podemos won its first political representation in the 2014 European Parliament election with 7.97% votes (1,245,948 votes) (Errejón, 2014; Zarzalejos, 2016). Following that, Podemos won around 20% of the votes casted in both the 2015 and 2016 general elections. It became the third largest parliamentary party in the 2016 general election, gaining representation in all regions (Rodríguez-Teruel, Barrio, & Barberà, 2016). In 2020, the left-wing alliance *Unidas Podemos* centered on Podemos and the left-wing *Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, abbreviated as PSOE) broke the 80-year bipartisan deadlock in Spain to form a coalition government (Jones, 2020, 2021; Rios, 2019). Although losing support since 2021 due to the failure to realize its electoral promises and the resignation of Iglesias from all party posts, Podemos had been a serious political contender in Spanish politics for a decade, with a stream of revolutionary and invigorating ideas that have left long-lasting effects on Spanish politics for years to come (Sola & Rendueles, 2018).

Campaigning as a progressive left-wing populist party with a strong emphasis on a young voter base, Podemos had placed environmental issues at its core since day one. It was critical of leading parties’ environmental policies, vocal on various environmental issues, proposed the *Green New Deal* (inspired by, and the name taken from the *Green New Deal* proposal in the U.S.), and took a step further to propose its own *Green Horizon Plan (Plan Horizonte Verde)* when existing environmental proposals were too moderate for its taste. Compared to right-wing parties’ fierce and purposeful framing of their environmental agendas, Podemos’s environmental efforts seemed to be shy of flames. It is also the only party among the four cases that did not

have a strong nationalistic or anti-globalization rhetoric attached to its environmental agendas. Yet, looking closely at Podemos' pro-environmental agendas, they were not short of sparks that effortlessly weaved their populist elements into their pro-environmental agendas.

The following analysis dissects Podemos' pro-environmental agendas to show how they are deeply rooted in two core elements of its populist rhetoric: 1). People-centricity, framing its pro-environmental agendas as projects initiated by and serving the demands of the common Spanish people; and 2). Anti-elitism, demonizing the political and economic elites as the enemy of the people who have betrayed their electorate and benefitted from Spain's stagnant political reality.

Each of the next two sections dives into one key feature of Podemos' populist pro-environmental rhetoric. Each section begins with an overview of one particular feature of Podemos' general populist rhetoric, and then transitions into dissecting its connections with Podemos' pro-environmental agendas. The first section is broken down into two sub-sections while the second section is undivided.

Evidence for this section is drawn from written and video materials published by the official Podemos website and channels, writings and speeches by key Podemos leaders, and secondary journalistic reports and scholarly literature related to Podemos' pro-environmental agendas.

1. We Can: A People's Movement for the Spanish Environment

Podemos's left-wing populist rhetoric centered around the idea of direct participatory democracy. As Iglesias put it, the idea behind the party is as straightforward as "citizens doing politics. If the citizens don't get involved in politics, others will. And that opens the door to them

robbing you of democracy, your rights and your wallet” (Kassam, 2014). Podemos brands itself as not only a party that stands up and advocates for citizens’ rights, but also as a party where “we don't want to structure ourselves in the same closed off way... We're a citizen force, made up of people who got together and ran an electoral campaign practically without any money,” according to Iñigo Errejón, Podemos’ campaign director (ibid.).

One key strategy of Podemos’ campaign was centered on the principle of participatory democracy by the general public. Podemos' primaries for the European elections were open to anyone who wanted to participate and attracted 33,000 voters in 2014 (ibid.). A cornerstone of the Podemos’ projects was *indignado*-style “circles,” or assemblies to unite local communities to meet, debate, or vote (Tremlett, 2015). These populist actions were intended, as Errejón (2014) put it, to create a party that is “headed by people that express new ways to relate to politics and represent a real threat for the two-party system...and those who have hijacked our democracy.”

This people-centricity of Podemos’ populist style anchored its environmental agendas and policy proposals from the *Green New Deal* to the *Green Horizon Plan* and influenced its positions on various environmental issues. Podemos also openly campaigned on a pro-environmental platform, “Podemos has championed the fight against climate change politically in Spain since its inception, including in all its electoral programs proposals and key measures to combat it and curb its devastating effects” (Podemos, 2019a).

The following two sub-sections unpack how the populist people-centricity played out in Podemos’ pro-environmental rhetoric in two ways.

1.1 Of the people: direct democracy and participatory politics for the environment

Since the very beginning of Podemos' campaign, they made it clear that Podemos will listen to and respond to the people, especially young people's demands for effective environmental actions. Podemos' members have worked on different fronts to respond to its constituencies. Txema Guijarro, a member of the Spanish parliament for Podemos said in an interview, "When we mobilize, we change things... and the young people who have come out onto the street telling us we do not have two planets" (Guijarro, 2019). Similar messages had been broadcasted on Podemos' official YouTube channel. In a campaign video for their *Green New Deal*—the most prominent pro-environmental legislations supported by the Podemos—the narration by a young woman went, "Students from all over the world are mobilizing and finding their own ways of doing politics to demand real and courageous actions against climate change. Hundreds of thousands of young people say...that if the planet were a bank, we would have already rescued it... We need to...turn this economic system insensitive to the care of the people and the planet and incompatible with respect for the rights of the majority and also of nature" (Podemos, 2019b).

In both cases, Podemos communicated directly to its followers to show that it is listening to the voices of young people, a major source of its electoral support. Then, Podemos branded its policy orientations as a response to their demands. The *Green New Deal* video ended with the narrator saying, "We [the youth] are the ones who will have to live that future. If we want, we can" (ibid). Podemos used the pun of Podemos meaning "we can" to send the message of itself being a party that is built on and responding to people's calls for climate action.

Transitioning to Podemos' more ambitious *Green Horizon Plan* in 2020, the appeal to the people as architects for Spain's climate future was reinforced. In the official announcement for

the *Green Horizon Plan*, it pointed out that “the implementation of these measures [in the Green Horizon Plan] will require an unprecedented mobilization of all the productive and intellectual energies of our country” (Podemos, 2019a). Such “mobilization” implied that Podemos intended to pull resources from people across the country to make it a collective project for the environment. It “is a participatory politics where we appeal to a certain kind of people power...basing ourselves on mass mobilization” (Guijarro, 2019).

1.2 For the people: Podemos’ environmental agendas at people’s service

In conjunction with the idea of being responsive to people’s demands on environmental issues, Podemos went at length to promise that its policy proposals will be centered on the Spanish people’s interests. Podemos’ pro-environmental agendas were branded as not only democratically drafted by the people, but also carefully crafted for them. The element of people-centricity was articulated by one of Podemos’ MEPs, Pablo Echenique, “You cannot take care of the environment without taking care of people first” (Podemos, 2019a). Further, Podemos’ pro-environmental agendas promised that it would not let the burden of sustainability fall disproportionately on them as it had been before. To this end, *Unidas Podemos* stated, “It is clear that the cost of an ecological transition cannot be borne by those who are most affected. The cost has to be for those who have polluted the most. That is why we are talking about a change in the production model... because it has to decrease from above and not from below” (Gallego, 2019).

One of the core pro-environmental initiatives pushed by Podemos was transitioning energy companies’ ownership from private to fully public via establishing “a national company” (Guijarro, 2019). As early as 2014, the *Green New Deal* was committed to “establish a number of strategic public companies... [including] a state investment bank so as to secure Spain’s

energy transition to 100 percent renewables over the next 20 years” (ibid.). Podemos framed it as the most democratic form of governance over energy production and the foundation for replacing fossil fuel with renewable energy. Not only did public ownership line up neatly with Podemos’ left-wing ideologies, but public ownership in Podemos’ populist blueprint also meant ownership by the Spanish people, aligning with its populist principle of people-centricity.

The creation of more jobs for the Spanish people was also one of the core promises in Podemos’ pro-environmental agendas. The *Green New Deal* claimed to “generate quality jobs, reduce inequalities, and take care of the planet as a priority” (Podemos, 2019b). According to Pablo Ecnenique, the *Green New Deal* aimed “to create hundreds of quality jobs, increase innovation, recover migrated talent, and start a path to compete at the top in the value-added industry” (Podemos, 2019a). All the goals envisioned were tailored toward making the Spanish economy stronger and more sustainable for the welfare of its people. Later, the *Green Horizon Plan* explicitly promised “the creation of two jobs for each job that is lost will be guaranteed by law” (ibid.). On the issue of fighting wildfires, specifically, Podemos resolved to “improving the working conditions of professionals and increasing the size of the workforce” (ibid.). All of the environmental issues and solutions proposed by Podemos were framed to prioritize ordinary Spanish citizens’ interests.

2. No More Special Interests: Podemos’ Anti-elite Pro-environmental Agendas

As the breakthrough party in Spanish politics, Podemos put significant efforts into constructing its identity as radically different from the ruling elites who were the culprits of “the two-party system...and those who have hijacked our democracy” (Errejón, 2014). The elite caste (*la casta*), was “a diffuse term that could include politicians, bankers, speculators, and any other

privileged group” (Sola & Rendueles, 2018). These elites sustained and benefited from Spain’s corrupt and stagnant political, social, and economic system. They were oblivious to people’s plight. The elites selfishly utilized their privilege for personal gains instead of serving the ordinary people. Iglesias made this clear by saying, “Look, those people are your enemies” (Tremlett, 2015) and openly called the super-rich “enemies of Spain” (Guijarro, 2019).

In contrast to the elites, Podemos branded itself as the true alternative representing the real interests of the people. For example, Iglesias claimed that MEPs representing other parties in Spain "travel to Brussels in business class” and have “colluded with lobbyists behind the scenes” (Kassam, 2014). Iglesias, on the other hand, claimed to be the down-to-earth outsider and promised that “if any lobby group approaches us, we’ll make that information public” (ibid.). Errejón (2014) backed this rhetoric by saying that “Podemos was born as a tool in the service of ‘popular unity and citizenship’, namely the articulation of ‘floating’ discontent in order to create a popular mobilization to reclaim sovereignty and democracy held hostage by the oligarchic caste.” Podemos also highlighted its approaches to party financing issues to set itself apart from wealthy parties. They asserted that “we’re doing a people’s campaign, we need to show how we’re different. The others get checks from banks — we appeal to our own base” (Guijarro, 2019). Podemos presented itself as a tool for the people to overturn the monopoly of power by the elites and to finally run the country democratically for their real interests.

This strong anti-elite sentiment anchored many items in Podemos’ pro-environmental agendas. In Podemos’ campaign video for the *Green New Deal*, the narrator highlighted that “the economic crisis of the last decade has left clear winners and losers while precariousness has increased, and inequality have not been reversed... The great fortunes of the banks, the vulture funds and the larger energy companies have seen their profits multiply... [They] cannot, even if

they wanted to make these changes a reality” (Podemos, 2019b). The entire package was based on the premise that the elites who benefited from the past economic crises have neither the willingness nor means to build a more sustainable and equitable system in Spain. Therefore, Podemos, as the political alternative standing up for the Spanish people, declared itself the solution people needed by advancing “sets of measures which have never really been seen in Spain before” (Guijarro, 2019). Podemos took a step further in its more radical *Green Horizon Plan* with two central measures: “The prohibition of revolving doors between public officials and the boards of directors” and “The creation of a public energy company” (Gallego, 2019).

Plans for the energy sector played a major part in Podemos’s anti-elite pro-environmental agendas. Iglesias exposed a list of former political leaders who were members of major energy corporations’ boards of directors (these corporations included *Endesa Iberdrola*, *Naturgy*, *Abengoa*, and *Enagas*). Iglesias concluded that “if these companies buy former ministers and former presidents, it is impossible to face the challenges of climate change” (ibid.). They set out to prove that the elites gained significant profits from such privatization of energy, “The profit margin of the large Spanish electricity companies (for their business in Spain) practically doubles that of their European counterpart: what we could call ‘extra profits’... amount to €9,400 million. This money has come out of the consumer’s pocket” (Podemos, 2016). To change the status quo, Iglesias promised to replace the “oligarchies” running private electricity companies with public energy companies that will serve the interests of the people and “to guarantee that no one suffer from energy poverty” (Gallego, 2019). Podemos laid out its nationalization campaign based on the principle that “access to energy, like access to housing or education, is a citizen’s right” (Podemos, 2016).

On the growing frequency of devastating forest fires, Podemos linked their causes to the inability of the current government to manage forests as a result of elite profiteering. Podemos claimed that “economic interests exert a great influence on the forest floor: they socialize the environmental losses and impacts and privatize the benefits, leaving aside the majority interest of the citizenry...covert privatization and the precariousness of salaries, has fueled the *fire business*” (Podemos Environmental Area, 2017). The corrupt elites not only ignored the growing risks of wildfires, but also found ways to profit from these natural disasters. Podemos, in response, proposed various policies to preserve forest “ecosystems and the sustainable natural landscape...the hallmarks of the rural environment” (Podemos Environmental Area, 2017). It also made promises of forest management based on the needs of rural populations who felt left behind by private interests and distant governing bodies.

Podemos (2015) published an official statement on the *World Environment Day*, stating that,

“Governments, by kidnapping institutions, protect an unsustainable production model that is causing the depletion of natural resources, energy geo-dependence and the greatest environmental problem facing Humanity: Climate Change...The kidnapping by public administrations that should watch over nature and make Spain progress towards sustainability, has launched partisan policies favoring a privileged minority while resources are depleted, our rivers and mountains are polluted and our unique species they perish... We are faced with the political responsibility of abandoning any policy that does not assume that there is only one planet and that it is finite.”

This quote encapsulated Podemos' anti-elite logic behind its populist pro-environmental agendas. Podemos centered its rhetoric on criticisms of elites' corruption and self-interests as well as presented itself as the new political alternative serving the interests of the people.

VIII. Left-wing, Anti-environment Party: Chávez and Maduro's Regime in Venezuela

Last but not least, this final case study brings us to Venezuela, in Latin America. The country has been under a left-wing, Socialist populist regime for decades, led by a succession of two authoritarian leaders, Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro. For a country with heavy reliance on the extraction of natural resources, Venezuela has always relied on anti-environment agendas in the sense that its policies and rhetoric justified the extraction of fossil fuels and minerals. The populist rhetoric employed by both Venezuelan presidents didn't usually address environmental issues directly as opposed to other populist leaders' rhetoric discussed in previous chapters. This case exemplifies a particular kind of indirect anti-environmental agendas that is, nonetheless, firmly anchored in a populist rhetoric.

This chapter begins with an overview of both Chavez and Maduro's populist style as well as laying out Venezuelan's trajectory of anti-environmental agendas under their governance. Then, four subsequent sections detail the populist elements anchoring Chávez and Maduro's anti-environmental agendas.

Overview: Chávez and Maduro, Populism, and Anti-environmental Agendas

Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro have been charismatic populist leaders of Venezuela for over two decades. Chávez led the country with the left-wing *Socialist Fifth Republic Movement (Movimiento Quinta República)* during his first 10 years in office and then founded the *United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, abbreviated as PSUV)* in 2007. PSUV had since supported both him and Maduro as the dominant party of Venezuela. The following paragraphs will introduce Chávez and Maduro's left-wing

populist style and their anti-environment agendas to set up for more detailed analysis in upcoming sections.

Roberts (2012, p. 136) claimed that “Chávez was arguably the most quintessential populist figure Latin America had seen since Juan Perón...However populism was defined, Chávez fit, as he seemingly embodied whatever core and ancillary properties were attached to the concept.” There seems to be a broad consensus on Chávez’s prominence as Latin America’s most iconic populist leader (e.g. Hawkins, 2009; Sagarzazu & Thies, 2018; Zúquete, 2008). This was also demonstrated by Chávez’s cornerstone Socialistic project *Chavismo*. It was founded on the populist and “morally constructed antagonistic duality between a virtuous ‘people’ (*el pueblo*) and an incorrigibly venal and corrupt elite (the oligarchy or, more colorfully, the ‘rancid oligarchy’ in the parlance of *Chavismo*)” (Roberts, 2012, p. 136).

Chávez positioned himself as the true representative of the people by campaigning for Socialist programs such as massive social spending from oil revenues, nationalization of key industries, and a direct form of democracy “based on plebiscitarian expressions of popular sovereignty and grassroots participation in community organizations and self-governing structures” (Farnsworth, 2021; Roberts, 2012, p. 137). Maduro, as the hand-picked successor for Chávez, followed his footsteps to continue this *Chavistas* left-wing populist campaign as he asserted that “I am doing nothing else but fulfilling the mission entrusted to me by Comandante President Hugo Chávez Frías as I have been doing and as I will do out of love for his person and his work” (Venezuela, 2013). Aside from his dubious electoral victory after Chávez’s death and fraud allegations overshadowing subsequent elections, Maduro clung to power with his populist rhetoric’s appeal and legitimization. He defended himself by saying that “I, Nicolás Maduro Moros, am a genuinely and profoundly democratic president” (Phillips, 2019).

Abiding by the textbook populist style, Chávez was very skillful at positioning himself as the political alternative for the people against threats from enemies abroad and elites at home. Reminiscent of Venezuela's anti-colonial struggles, anti-imperialist sentiments have always been a central component of Chávez's populism. They particularly targeted the U.S., their "imperialistic neighbor." Chávez portrayed the United States as a looming imperialistic threat to Venezuelan freedom and independence, especially after "Washington's thinly veiled support for the military coup that briefly removed him from office in April 2002" (Roberts, 2012, pp. 144-146). In addition to enemies abroad, Chávez also put considerable efforts into demonizing the political and economic elites at home, especially regarding the oil oligarchy and elites' corruption. Positioning himself as the polar opposite of these "evil" forces, Chávez painted himself as the true outsider and representative of the people, promising to "care for the lower classes, work to eradicate neoliberalism, and continue to challenge the imperialists in the United States" (Ellner, 2003).

In his 2006 campaign closing speech (Hawkins, 2009), Chávez put all these populist elements and his "cosmic" struggle against the evil into perspective by saying:

"Let no one forget that we are confronting the Devil himself. Sunday, 3 December at the ballot box. We will confront the imperialist government of the United States of North America [sic]—that is our real adversary, not these has-beens here, these lackeys of imperialism. . . . Because you are not going to reelect Chávez really you are going to reelect yourselves, the people will reelect the people. Chávez is nothing but an instrument of the people."

Continuing the populist legacy of Chávez, Maduro carried on his core populist rhetoric. In his 80-minute address to fellow *Chavistas* and international leftist allies, Maduro said (Phillips, 2019):

“Stop, Europe ... Don’t come again with your old colonialism. Don’t come again with your old aggression. Don’t come again, old Europe, with your old racism. There’s been enough enslavement – the looting that you subjected us to for 500 years ... We are a true, profound, popular, and revolutionary democracy ... not a democracy of the elites ... of super-millionaires who go into power to enrich their economic group and to rob the people.”

A key area where Chávez and Maduro employed their populist rhetoric was the environment. Despite being known for active participation at international climate conferences and keeping up with most major climate treaties, Venezuela has always had a fundamentally anti-environmental regime stemmed from its reliance on oil and mineral extraction.

Venezuela has a deep reliance on oil extraction, especially through its state-owned oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)* (Baena, 2019; Berg, 2021; Hellinger, 2016, 2021; Wiseman & BéLand, 2010). The *Orinoco Oil Belt* accounted for 95% of the country’s export, earnings around 55% of the federal budget as for 2012. Chávez’s *Sowing the Oil Crop plan (Plan Siembra Petrolera)* aimed to produce 4 million barrels of oil a day by 2014 and 10 million by 2030 (Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2012). Regulations over oil extractions were minimized over the years to generate greater profit at the expense of environmental protection. For example, between 2010 and 2016, PDVSA self-reported more than 46,000 oil spills and announced that it would stop reporting them starting from 2016 (Berg, 2021). In July 2020, the

El Palito refinery leaked over 20,000 barrels of oil into the water, spreading to the protected Morrocoy National Park (ibid.). And in June 2021, an oil tank at Punta Cardón in Falcón State leaked 3.6 million liters of gasoline over nice days, through a crack in its base resulted from the lack of maintenance since 2016 (ibid.). Venezuela also ranks as the top seven countries in the world for gas flaring, the combustion of natural-gas byproducts that releases a considerable amount of methane into the atmosphere (ibid.). All these examples show how Venezuela not only relied heavily on resource extraction but was also conducive to additional environmental damages caused by the extractions.

Reacting to international sanctions on oil exports, Maduro shifted its extractive focus to expand mining in the *Orinoco Mining Arc (Arco Minero del Orinoco)*. This mining arc opened up 112,000 square kilometers of the Amazon rainforest—some of the most biodiverse areas of the Amazon rainforest and borders Canaima National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site—for mining. It contains proven reserves of thousands and millions of tons of gold, diamonds, iron, bauxite, copper, coltan, etc. (Ebus, 2018; Notilogía, 2016; Rendon, 2020). No environmental impact assessment in the region was carried out despite being mandated by law (Ebus, 2018). Moreover, the Maduro regime has been reported to use state security to facilitate rampant criminal mining groups to extract, process, and sell minerals (Rendon, 2020).

These actions under Chávez and Maduro proved an assessment of Venezuelan environmental governance by the EU in 2007 (European Commission, 2007). It concluded that:

“A significant gap remains between the advanced framework and apparent political willingness of the authorities on one hand, and continued difficulties in relation to the country’s environmental performance and achievements. Particular challenges include

deforestation, desertification, a reduction in biodiversity, insufficient management of waste and pollution caused by industry, agriculture, and mining areas.”

In this context of Chávez and Maduro’s left-wing populist rhetoric and their anti-environmental projects, three following sections unpack how their anti-environmental agendas are anchored in three populist elements. These three elements are: 1). Anti-Capitalism, framing the economic elites as the enemy who exploits natural resources for selfish gains at the expense of the Venezuelan people; 2). Anti-imperialism, framing foreign powers as a threat to Venezuelan national sovereignty which needs to be defended with national control over Venezuela’s natural resources; and 3). People-centricity, promising to defend and benefit ordinary Venezuelan citizens with resource extraction.

Before diving into each populist element in detail, I begin with a section that analyzes Chávez’s world-renowned speech at the 2009 *Copenhagen UN Climate Change Conference*. This speech shows a convergence of Chávez’s three populist elements anchoring his anti-environmental agendas. After this section, three subsequent sections unpack each populist anchor of Venezuela’s anti-environmental agendas in more detail.

The evidence for the following sections is drawn from Chávez and Maduro’s speeches, official party documents and government policies, press releases, and relevant secondary journalistic and scholarly sources.

Anchoring Rhetoric: A Convergence of Chávez’s Anti-environmental Agendas’ Populist Anchors

In 2009, one of the most important *UN Climate Change Conferences* was held in Copenhagen. There, Chávez delivered the speech on climate that he was most known for. It was

a 15-minute tirade blaming the deteriorating state of the environment on Capitalism, the “imperial dictatorship” of the developed countries, and the exploitation of the ordinary people by the elites and the super-rich. This speech is a perfect example showing the convergence of all three key populist elements in Chávez’s anti-environmental agendas.

Before diving into the speech itself, one clarification is needed. The speech delivered by Chávez at this summit was not explicitly anti-environmental at first glance. He actually acknowledged and highlighted that “climate change is undoubtedly the most devastating environmental problem of this century” (Chávez, 2013). Yet, consistent with his implicit domestic anti-environmental agendas was that he shifted the blames for causing and the burdens of addressing climate change to developed countries. Thus, he justified letting developing countries like Venezuela carry minimum responsibilities for addressing climate change. Along these lines, Chávez advocated, “Developed countries should set binding, clear and concrete commitments for the substantial reduction of their emissions and assume obligations of financial and technological assistance to poor countries to cope with the destructive dangers of climate change” (ibid.).

In this speech, Chávez was vocal about anti-Capitalism, an unusual position to take on international platforms. Yet it was consistent with Chávez’s populist and Socialistic agendas. Capitalism and the economic elites were crucial to his populist construction of the evil enemies. He said, “Let’s talk about the cause, let’s not evade responsibilities, and let’s not evade the depth of this problem. The cause, undoubtedly...is the destructive metabolic system of capital and its embodied model: Capitalism” (ibid.). Capitalism breeds an extremely uneven social structure, leading to differential responsibilities to climate change. Chávez claimed that “we are profoundly unequal...Seven percent is responsible, these 500 million richest people are responsible for 50

percent of emissions, while the poorest 50 percent accounts for only seven percent of emissions” (ibid.). By framing the economic elites under Capitalism as the ultimate culprits for the climate crisis, Chávez also painted them as enemies of the people. The economic elites selfishly chose not to take responsibility for the harm they caused as Chávez mocked them, “If the climate were a bank, it would have been saved already” (ibid.).

Another key enemy of the people in Chávez’s populist environmental rhetoric was the imperial powers, led by the U.S. and other developed countries. He claimed that “what we are experiencing on this planet is an imperial dictatorship, and from here we continue denouncing it...There is a group of countries that consider themselves superior to us in the South, to us in the Third World, to us, the underdeveloped countries” (ibid.). Developed countries are the wrongdoers who exploited smaller countries under neoliberalism and imposed on them environmental degradation and economic backwardness. The current situation was believed to be single-handedly caused by these global powers whose “political conservatism and selfishness...show high insensitivity and lack of solidarity with the poor, the hungry, and the most vulnerable to disease, to natural disasters” (ibid.).

Last but not least, following the framing of the enemies, the populist rhetoric is not complete until one advocates for the oppressed, ordinary people. Chávez referred to this point towards the end of his speech, concluding that “we the peoples of the world ask of the empires, to those who try to continue dominating the world and exploiting us...let’s stop environmental degradation and avoid the great catastrophe of climate change, let’s integrate ourselves into the noble goal of everyone being more free and united” (ibid.). It echoed both his Socialist platforms and the branding of himself as the true leader of the people.

1. Anti-Capitalism: Reclaiming Resources from the Elites in a Socialist State

As left-wing, Socialist, populist leaders, Chávez and Maduro naturally incorporated anti-Capitalist framings into their anti-environmental rhetoric. *Law of the Homeland Plan: Second Socialist plan for the Economic and Social Development of the Nation 2013~2019 (Ley del Plan de la Patria: Segundo Plan Socialista de Desarrollo Económico y Social de la Nación 2013-2019*, abbreviated as LHP) was a comprehensive plan presented by PSUV in 2013, laying out main socio-economic objectives and policy orientations for the country. In its opening section on “The plan of the homeland, a new phase of the Bolivarian Revolution,” objective II aimed “to continue building the Bolivarian socialism of the 21st century in Venezuela as an alternative to the destructive and savage system of capitalism and thereby ensure the ‘greatest amount of social security, the greatest amount of political stability and the greatest amount of happiness’ for our people” (Venezuela, 2013, pp. 4-5). It is a perfect example of the populist dualism between the corrupt Capitalism and the happiness of the people, where promoting the latter by destroying the former is Chávez’s populist priority.

This anti-Capitalist goal was translated into various environment-related policy proposals in the same document, such as Objective 2.1 on oil extraction, “Transcending the capitalist oil rentier model towards the socialist productive economic model, based on the development of the productive forces” (ibid., 13). Similar rhetoric was also used on international platforms. Claudia Salerno, the top negotiator for Venezuela at the UN’s *Doha Climate Change Conference*, criticized the idea of carbon trading as “mechanisms to take profit of a certain kind of pollution” (Salerno, 2012). This justified Venezuela’s objections to pro-environmental carbon trading on the grounds of refusing to be taken hostage by the global Capitalist system.

Along the lines of denouncing Capitalism was the antagonization of the economic elites. One prominent group that was consistently vilified by Chávez was PDVSA's managers, prior to nationalization. Chávez employed the populist rhetoric to name them an "exploitative international ruling elite" who amassed resources and wealth at the expense of the general Venezuelan people (Wiseman & BéLand, 2010). To take control back from the elites, Chávez announced that "PDVSA belongs to all Venezuelans... This *petroleum elite*, which for years managed the enterprise that belongs to all Venezuelans... there was always hidden a deep anti-national and anti-Venezuelan sentiment" (ibid.). This villainization of the oil elites helped to justify Chávez's push to nationalize PDVSA and to legitimize the flow of extensive oil revenue into the government's funds.

2. Anti-imperialism: Oil and Mining as Symbols of National Sovereignty

As a former Spanish colony fought its way to independence, Venezuela has anti-imperialism running deep in its veins. This historical sentiment has been elevated by Chávez and Maduro's populist regime to another level, especially for justifying the exploitation of the country's natural resources such as oil and minerals.

The first step of integrating anti-imperial sentiments into the populist anti-environmental rhetoric was to establish the antagonism and enmity between the Venezuelan nation and foreign powers. The most intensive attack on foreign countries, other than from Chávez's 2009 UN speech, was targeted at U.S. sanctions imposed on pro-Maduro parties and businesses for Maduro's violation of democratic principles and human rights, particularly sanctions on oil export. Maduro called it a "total oil blockade by the North American empire; of the total persecution by imperialism" (Albacity.org, 2020) and "sanctions against us are a serious

violation of Venezuelans' human rights. And it's not only a cruel mechanism that attacks the population...[but also] to prompt a regime change" (Maduro, 2021). Consistently, Maduro used hostile language to describe these sanctions with phrases like "assault," "persecution," and "sabotage" (Palmigiani, 2021). He set up the U.S. and its Western allies as enemies trying to bend Venezuela to their demands or to turn the Venezuelan government into their puppet for its natural resources.

In response to these carefully constructed imperial enemies abroad, Maduro's second populist step was to frame himself as the staunch defender of Venezuela's national sovereignty, independence, and freedom. He was not afraid to confront foreign powers head-on. In an interview with the BBC in 2019, Maduro addressed these international "aggressions" directly by distinguishing Venezuela from other oil-rich countries troubled by relations with the U.S. He declared that "Venezuela is not Iran or Libya, Venezuela has its capacity. We will confront all these issues and be assured that all those campaigns of media aggression, of lies, we will slowly start to conquer them with reality" (Maduro, 2019). In a general debate of UN's 75th session, Maduro's speech carried a similar message, claiming that "neither an illegal embargo nor aggression against our government have taken us off our path to protect the lives of our people. We are resisting this criminal, inhuman aggression... We're fighting for peace, for our homeland, for our region, for humanity" (United Nations, 2020). Instances like these helped to boost Maduro's strongman image as a populist leader who would defend the country's natural resources, sovereignty, and people against international aggressors.

This populist anti-imperialist rhetoric was not simply manifested in a defensive stance against foreign powers. Chávez and Maduro took the anti-imperialist spirit a step further to construct the idea of oil sovereignty. Chávez was its original architect who made oil a symbol of

national sovereignty in Venezuela. Economic independence gained from oil revenue symbolizes Venezuela's anti-imperialist struggles and national pride (Wiseman & BéLand, 2010). During the process of nationalizing PDVSA, Maduro "redefined [its role] in line with the broader national interest" (Buxton, 2003, p. 125) as public ownership of oil became synonymous with the populist and Socialist promises of economic equality among the people.

Chávez translated anti-imperialism and oil sovereignty into policy proposals in LHP, guided by "the fourth major historic objective...to move forward in the search for a multi-centric and pluripolar world, without imperial domination and with unrestricted respect for the self-determination of peoples" (Venezuela, 2013, pp. 4-5). Elaborating on this principle was "Policy 27. Oil Sovereignty: To reduce the economic, industrial and technological dependence of the national oil industry...that strengthen Full Oil Sovereignty," and to "develop Industrial Conglomerates and Petro-industrial Bases in the Orinoco Oil Belt" with industrial advancements, expansion of oil transportation systems, and developments of oil-related technologies (Venezuela, 2013, p. 33). These actions eventually fed into Chávez's promise of using "oil to make local capital instead of foreign capital" to invest into Socialist programs for the ordinary Venezuelan citizens (Parker, 2005, p. 45).

Resonating with Chávez's framing of oil extraction as a symbol of national sovereignty, Maduro (2021) reiterated its importance by saying that "Venezuela has a right to produce oil freely, to sell it, to make profit from it, to comply with international regulations, to provide for its people...We want to reach 1,500,000 barrels of petroleum production." In addition to oil extraction, another anti-imperialist weapon wielded by Maduro was the control and expansion of the mining industry. Maduro and the minister of ecological mining development Robert Mirabal saw gold production in *Orinoco Mining Arc* as a symbol of national victory in the "economic

war” against foreign sanctions and of the success of the Venezuelan “productive model” (Rosales, 2017).

3. For the People: Prioritizing Venezuelan People’s Well-being and Agency

There is no populism without putting people under the spotlight. Alongside setting up the dual identities of the enemy—Capitalist elites and imperial powers—in their populist anti-environmental agendas, Chávez and Maduro directly appealed to the ordinary Venezuelan people by promising them a centerpiece of the state’s profitable oil and mining operations. This framing is consistent with Zúquete’s (2008, p. 92) characterization of *Chavismo* as a form of “missionary politics” in which a charismatic leader “leads a chosen people gathered into a moral community struggling against all-powerful and conspiratorial enemies, and engaged in a mission toward redemption and salvation.”

The well-being of the Venezuelan people was framed as the foundation for Chávez and Maduro’s anti-environmental agendas. In the opening passages of LHP, the populist project was framed as a tool to achieve “the greatest social happiness and political stability for the Venezuelan people, under the socialist thinking and action of the Supreme Commander and Leader of the Bolivarian Revolution, Hugo Chávez” and “to continue advancing in the full satisfaction of the basic necessities for the life of our people” (Venezuela, 2013, pp. 2, 4). Specific policies were proposed to achieve these populist goals, including the expansion of domestic oil extraction as discussed in earlier sections. When presenting LHP to the country, Chávez declared that it was the people who “will be in charge of the program” (ibid.). LHP was established not only as a program designed for the people, but also as a deeply democratic program to give initiatives back to the people.

This type of grassroots action called on by Chávez was also shown in the case of oil workers taking control of oil installations prior to their nationalization in 2007. Venezuela's oil minister Rafael Ramirez described it as "President Chávez has ordered us to take full control over the sovereignty of our oil, and we are doing that today," paving the way for nationalization and expansion of oil extraction in Venezuela at the turn of the decade (Elliott, 2007). Chávez was able to justify the nationalization of oil companies because he instructed the oil minister Tareck El Aissami and the president of PDVSA Asdrúbal Chávez, to “speak with the working class, to recover everything...and to guarantee that our PDVSA shines and flies high for the benefit of our Venezuela” (Albacity.org, 2020). Maduro later signed a decree extending the leadership of the *Ali Rodríguez Araque Presidential Commission* in PDVSA to tighten his control over oil production with the same people-centric logic.

Maduro’s development of the *Orinoco Mining Arc* was also justified in the name of the people. Maduro claimed that small-scale miners and indigenous communities were included in the mining arc’s new development model and that the state was able to manage areas rampant with illegal mining and gang-related violence (Rosales, 2017). Although neither action were confirmed to be true (Ebus, 2018), Maduro was able to exploit this populist rhetoric of safeguarding the rights and security of minority people to push through mining expansion. In his Twitter post promoting the development of the mining arc, Maduro claimed that “Venezuela has a Mining Sector Plan 2019-2025... we will move towards the prosperity and happiness of the people” (NicolasMaduro, 2019).

IX. Discussion

These four case studies show that populist parties manifest greater variations in the directions they have taken on environmental agendas than what the literature has suggested. Multiple parties, even right-wing parties, have promoted broad pro-environmental agendas, and each party emphasized different environmental issues in their respective environmental agenda. None of this has been fully captured by previous scholarship.

More importantly, these case studies demonstrate that despite variations along party lines and environmental stances, populist parties ultimately anchor their environmental agendas in their populist rhetoric. These framing anchors are generally grounded in three features of populism: people-centricity, nationalism, and anti-elitism. In addition to this core argument, in the following sections, I discuss four additional findings from the case studies: 1) group variations in environmental agendas' populist anchors among cases and their core consistencies; 2) the environment as a secondary issue in the populist core; 3) the outward-facing construction of the enemy on environmental issues; and 4) sustained consensus on the acknowledgment of environmental issues.

1. Group Variations in Framing Anchors of Populist Parties' Environmental Agendas

At first glance, the populist anchors of each parties' environmental agendas seem to converge into three core populist elements: people-centricity, nationalism, and anti-elitism. Yet, just from these four cases, considerable variations in their populist framing strategies can be observed. The following two sub-sections will shed light on them. Along the lines of the operationalization of this thesis, I first discuss the variations along party lines, and then along

positions of their environmental agendas. Finally, I circle back to stress the populist framing consistency of these parties' environmental agendas.

1.1 Party-family variations

For right-wing populist parties, exclusive nationalism has been one of their core features to appeal to supporters (Dunn, 2013; Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2013). It underlies some of their key policy orientations such as opposition to immigration and hostility towards free trade. The same tendencies are manifested in the U.S.'s and France's right-wing populist parties' environmental agendas. Both parties' rhetoric draws extensively from nationalistic ideas, rejecting any international treaties or collaborations, and taking matters into their own hands. Sovereignty is key in these cases, especially energy sovereignty which underpins policies on resource extraction and energy generation to ensure a country is self-sufficient in energy. Both parties equate national interests with the people's interests, framing themselves as guardians of the people by prioritizing the country's environmental needs ahead of anything else. In the U.S., this has taken the form of "American-first" principles, while in France, it is incarnated in the idea of "nationalistic green localism.

For left-wing populist parties, the most prominent shared feature is populist Socialism. Both parties pushed for the nationalization of private companies in key energy sectors. Indeed, nationalization policies do reflect the influences of nationalistic values, yet these populist parties' focuses differ from right-wing nationalism in two ways. Firstly, the nationalization proposed in Spain and Venezuela did not exclusively target foreign companies, but mostly domestic companies. Nationalization was translated into the Socialist populist idea of the people's democratic public ownership. Secondly, and despite Chavez's aggressive anti-imperialist

campaign, these two parties have been quite receptive to the international community at many levels, such as Venezuela's track record of ratifying UN climate treaties and Spain's moderate attitudes towards the EU and other international organizations. Hence, both parties' policy emphasis on nationalization aligns with their populist Socialist appeals. In addition, both parties have a greater proportion of their language explicitly referencing the people and Socialist values than do right-wing parties, further demonstrating their key framing anchor in populist Socialism.

Another key difference between left- and right-wing populist parties' environmental agendas' framing anchors is that right-wing populist leaders tend to address environmental issues more directly and explicitly than left-wing populists do. Both Le Pen and Trump spent considerable time and energy talking about the environment directly throughout various campaigns and touched on many issues ranging from energy to natural resources, from conservation to human well-being. They also continued their populist style of using inflammatory and emotional language around the environment, either defending their own agendas or attacking enemies' policies or intentions. Conversely, left-wing populist parties omitted many key environmental issues from their agendas. For Podemos, even though they had run on a pro-environmental agenda from day one, there was little source material on their actual language or policies on environmental issues, as compared to the other three. For Venezuela, both Chavez and Maduro danced around most environmental issues by focusing on resource extraction and by shifting the responsibility for environmental actions to developed countries.

1.2 Environmental orientation variations

The main difference in environmental agenda framing between pro- and anti-environmental populist parties comes down to their environmental agendas' levels of specificity.

Anti-environmental populists tend to advocate for specific policy directions while pro-environmental ones tend to rely on the principle of direct democracy and leave more room for citizens to decide.

Anti-environmentalist populist parties in Venezuela and the U.S. have presented clear environmental agendas backed by a variety of national policies. In Venezuela, both Chavez's and Maduro's regimes were underpinned by strong-willed resource-extraction policies. The former concentrated on oil extraction marked by the nationalization of the PDVSA and the opening of the *Orinoco Oil Belt* for drilling; the latter focused on opening up mining operations in the *Orinoco Mining Arc*. In the U.S., there was a large repertoire of legislation under Trump aimed at striking down environmental protection and opening up natural resources and land for economic activities (Popovich et al., 2021). Both of their rhetorical repertoires also resonated with this level of assuredness with decisive tones and clear references to particular legislations, working with a clear pathway and explicit agendas.

On the other hand, pro-environment populists tend to be more vague in their agendas' environmental initiatives. They do, however, tend to focus more on the mechanisms through which pro-environmental actions could be done, instead of laying out concrete steps. Indeed, both Le Pen and Iglesias presented signature pro-environmental packages during their campaigns. RN had the *New Ecology* movement and Podemos had both the *Green New Deal* and the *Green Horizon Plan*. Yet, partly because of their limited campaign success, none of their environmental proposals were widely implemented. More importantly, judging from the proposals themselves, the scope of issues covered, and the number of directly applicable policies fell short in general. The *New Ecology* movement relied heavily on the principles of patriotic ecology, localism and regional self-determination, and the *New Ecology Collective* press releases

overwhelmingly focused on environment-related comments or criticisms over other organization's policies rather than proposing actions. Neither the *Green New Deal* nor the *Green Horizon Plan* by Podemos presented a clear roadmap for policymaking. Rather, they were mostly rhetorical campaign tools that left space open for citizens to decide under direct democracy.

1.3 Populist framings after all: consistencies among variations

Despite the variations observed across the four case studies, one consistency—at the heart of this thesis's argument—is that all populist parties anchor their environmental agendas in populist principles and frame them with populist language. The variations act as powerful proof to show that even with such a diverse pool of populist environmental agendas, strategies, and orientations, they ultimately fall under the command of a populist core. The unwavering strength of their populist rhetoric serves as an anchor for each of their environmental agendas to fit into their overall populist political campaigns. The next section builds on this point.

2. The Environment as a Secondary Issue to the Populist Core

The second observation from these case studies is that the populist parties' environmental agendas are secondary to core issues closer to the heart of populism. Parties did not adjust their populist rhetoric or principles to fit the path of their environmental agendas. Rather, it was the opposite; populist parties framed their environmental agendas—whichever direction they took—in a way that fit their overall populist framework and key features of their populist rhetoric. This observation of environmental issues being secondary to the populist core is consistent with Duina and Carson's (2019) study. They found that far-right populist parties in Europe were able

to adapt to and incorporate inclusive and progressive agendas which come secondary to their populist core on nationalism and European superiority.

Populist parties adapt their environmental agendas to fit the national context and to justify them under their populist frameworks. The differential pursuit of energy sources by Venezuela and France is exemplary of how contrary policies have been justified by the same populist element— nationalism. Venezuela’s populist leaders justified fossil fuel extraction and mineral mining as patriotic because they boost national economic sovereignty in the face of imperial threats from the West. In France, however, the promotion of cleaner nuclear power over fossil fuel was a key step towards French “national sovereignty.”

In each case, the core populist features the case study countries employed were kept intact, and even reinforced when they embedded different environmental agendas. The populist logic remained coherent and rational because they had framed environmental agendas to fit them into their populist core. Therefore, regardless of how central environmental issues are to their populist parties’ campaigns, their environmental agendas remain secondary to their populist core.

In these four case studies, we have yet to see any key aspect of these parties’ environmental framing transcend or challenge the scope of their populist frameworks. Even for instances in which the populist parties’ environmental rhetoric is internally contradictory—such as Trump’s unusual appreciation for the American natural environment and conservation, and Chavez’s acknowledgment of the severity of climate change—they still adhere to their parties’ populist core. Moreover, I predict that environmental issues will remain peripheral to the core concerns of populist parties for a long time to come. They will remain secondary to concerns over immigration, national sovereignty, globalization, and the political elite. This could be

especially true concerning the pro-environmental populist parties with their limited success in implementing their policy proposals, in spite of being vocal on pro-environmental fronts.

Further, there are inherent incompatibilities between core populist features and environmentally favorable policy orientations that may render the scholarly emphasis on populist parties' overwhelming anti-environmental image true on a more essentialist level. For example, the global nature of climate change is inherently in conflict with nationalistic elements of populism, and pro-environmental policies constrained by national borders are curtailed. Yet, populist parties have yet to compromise on treating national boundaries as limits of environmental policies. Pro-environment populist parties will be tested when this conflict between the international nature of climate change and their insistence on nationalistic policy solutions exacerbates. Stressors on this front can come from the predicted increase in climate displacement and climate migration in the upcoming years. Populist parties could get away with their framing strategies as long as there is no conflict between their primary concerns and secondary issues. It is when such conflict arises and becomes unavoidable that the populist parties may be forced to re-frame their stances on secondary issues to preserve their primary ideologies.

3. The Outward-facing Construction of the Enemy on Environmental Issues

Continuing the conversation on issues populist parties face when confronting the global nature of climate change, the third observation these four case studies offer is that populist parties, when it comes to framing around environmental agendas, are forced to look outward to frame and respond to issues related to international actors.

It would be impossible to ignore the role of international organizations or foreign countries in climate change. Thus, populist parties devote a considerable portion of their environmental rhetoric to framing both international organizations and foreign countries. They all tend to stick with their populist nationalistic core and antagonize foreign states or institutions. This takes multiple forms such as dismissing or pulling out of international climate treaties, and painting other countries as enemies to national sovereignty and/or energy security.

This focused antagonization of international actors in populist environmental rhetoric can broaden our understandings of the populist framing of the “enemy.” Enemies in this case are no longer domestic groups based on ethnic identities or immigration status, but are stretched to the institutional level to include particular rival nation-states or international organizations. This is supported by what Brubaker (2017a) has characterized as “horizontal” opposition between insiders (the people) and outsiders (the enemy). The latter refers to a broad constellation of “impersonal forces or institutions” threatening the people’s way of life or security, such as “globalization, unfettered trade, the European Union...” (Ibid.).

Extrapolating from the case studies, this type of antagonization of foreign institutions can trigger two types of populist framings: offensive and defensive. The offensive stance can be seen in the U.S. where Trump’s rhetoric of responding to international enemies was aggressive competition in the international stage and making America the leading power on environmental-related issues to crush enemies. Conversely, the defensive stance is evidenced in the French and Venezuelan cases. Both parties’ reactions to foreign enemies were not to outcompete them like Trump had done. Rather, they framed their strategies along the lines of self-sufficiency and national sovereignty, not seeking to assert their dominance abroad to overtake their enemies.

4. The Last Global Consensus Standing? The Undeniability of Environmental Problems

Lastly, zooming out from the details of case studies, one surprising take-away is that despite the variations in populist parties' environmental agendas alone positions on the environment, it is difficult for them to take outright antagonistic stances towards the environment.

Even when populist parties have adopted broadly anti-environmental agendas such as in the U.S. or in Venezuela, there have remained sporadic moments—sometimes on prominent stages such as Chávez's speech at the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen—when both parties' leaders have acknowledged existing environmental problems⁴ and the necessity of environmental protections. This trend coincides with climate skeptics' recent change of tactics from outright climate denial to various forms of climate skepticism, since the former is losing traction with the public as both theoretical and real-life evidence of climate change becomes harder to refute (Runciman, 2017).

The compromise populist anti-environmental parties took to echo, or at least acknowledge, pro-environmental sentiments is particularly astounding. This is because populist parties are famous for, and gain much of their popularity from, being the party to break international norms on various issues. There is a long track record of populist leaders across the world ruthlessly overturning consensus on many global issues such as women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, the benefits of globalization, the recognition of international organizations, and neutral or favorable attitudes towards immigration. Populist parties' consensus on acknowledging environmental problems could be a breakthrough issue where they share

⁴ This is not necessarily the reality of climate change since Trump had banned the use of the term "climate change" in certain cases (McKibben, 2017), and had been an open climate denier throughout his years in office.

commonalities with the global consensus, regardless of the directions they take on environmental issues.

Yet, for two reasons, one should not be too optimistic about this turn of the events. Firstly, the ingenuity of anti-environmental populist parties' acknowledgment of environmental problems is questionable since they pursue hostile policies on many environmental fronts. The pro-environment sentiments also could be seen as mere gestures to maintain their appearances in certain instances such as Earth Day for Trump and the UN Climate Summits for Chávez. Secondly, consistent with studies on populist parties' strategic leveraging of environmental political opportunities to gain electoral support (Oswald et al., 2021), these good-faith pro-environmental acknowledgements are similar to opportunistic gestures aimed at gaining political capital for these populist parties.

X. Conclusion

I have chosen the four case studies—the Republican Party under Trump, the RN under Le Pen, Podemos under Iglesias, and Chávez and Maduro’s populist Socialist regime in Venezuela—for their variations in party family (left- or right-wing) and positions of environmental agendas (pro- or anti-environment). They provide evidence that populist parties’ environmental agendas, on both ends of the political spectrum, are more diverse and nuanced than the literature has suggested.

One consistency I have found among these variations is that these four populist parties ultimately anchor their environmental agendas in their populist rhetoric, specifically grounded in three key features of populism: people-centricity, nationalism, and anti-elitism. With this broadly consistent populist framing of environmental agendas in mind, populist parties do show considerable variations in how they articulate the populist framing of their environmental agendas. These variations can be observed among individual cases, along party lines, as well as along their environmental agendas’ orientations. Right-wing populist parties tend to frame their environmental agendas with exclusive nationalism as well as explicit language and policy orientations. Left-wing populist parties frame them around the idea of populist Socialism as well as being less comprehensive in policy coverage and implicit with language used. Parties tend to frame their anti-environmental agendas with more confidence and specificity, while those with pro-environmental agendas tend to be more vague and leave room for specific policies to be decided by direct democracy.

This thesis also offers several ways through which these case studies can broaden understandings of populism. Firstly, I demonstrate that environment issues come secondary to core issues closer to the heart of populist concerns. I predict that populist parties will prioritize

their stances on core issues if they conflict with their environmental agendas. One scenario could be future mass climate displacement and migration which would pit populist parties' nationalistic core against the international nature of climate change. Secondly, as populist parties are forced to respond to a global issue like climate change, I find that they are compelled to be more outward-facing and tend to frame their enemies at an institutional level to include foreign countries and international institutions. I extrapolate from the case studies that populist parties react to these international, institutional enemies either offensively or defensively. Lastly, despite being ingenuine and opportunistic in some cases, acknowledgement of environmental issues is universal among populist parties—a rare moment of cross-party consensus on a single issue.

The evidence presented in this thesis is limited to four populist parties. However, if correct and representative of the landscape of populist parties' environmental agendas' framing, it raises important questions about our understanding of the relationship between populism and the environment, as well as implications for the scholarly landscape of populism. Hence, I propose several questions for further investigation following the initial exploratory step undertaken by this thesis.

Firstly, more populist parties' environmental agendas should be investigated to assess whether they are all anchored in core elements of the populist rhetoric, and what new variations they bring to the table. Many populist parties with emphasis on the environment could be investigated, such as the AfD in Germany, Bolsonaro's regime in Brazil, the PiS in Poland, and the Five Star Movement in Italy. In addition, future studies could also account for an important variation that is beyond the scope of this thesis—populist parties with inconsistent environmental agendas. Investigation into RN could be broadened to achieve this since they were known for climate denial prior to 2014. This variation could be particularly powerful in revealing the

consistency of the populist framing and the anchoring of diverging environmental agendas adopted by the same party over the years. Austria's FPÖ and Germany's AfD also fit into this category.

Secondly, this thesis focuses on the rhetorical framing of populist parties' environmental agendas. Future studies could approach the topic from a more concrete and practical angle. Researchers could investigate environmental policies enacted by these populist parties to assess whether their actual policy orientations align with their populist political agendas. Lastly, the predictions from the discussion chapter could be tested in future studies. If there are cases of populist parties' environmental agendas conflicting with their core issues, the argument of the environment being a secondary populist issue could be tested. In addition, researchers could also follow the proliferating stances on climate skepticism and their connections with populist parties. As the fight against climate change intensifies, populist parties' prominence and their environmental agendas need to be explicated in more nuanced ways, as they could lead to a new tide of resistance against the critical needs of international climate governance and climate action.

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