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Bordering Discourses by Right-Wing Populist Parties:Perspectives from Cross-Border Regions

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« Bordering Discourses by Right-Wing Populist Parties : Perspectives from Cross-Border Regions»

Nicky LE FEUVRE
Doyenne

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Abstract

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical and empirical examination of the intricate relationship and elective affinity between right-wing populism and borders. Despite the prominence of border controls and the defence of territorial sovereignty as important concerns for right-wing populist parties (RWPPs), there has been limited systematic research regarding how these parties discursively shape and (re)produce borders across multiple territorial scales. To address this scholarly gap, I employ critical discourse analysis (CDA), specifically the discourse-historical approach (DHA), to explore the bordering discourses of RWPPs operating and competing in cross-border regions (CBRs). CBRs are crucial territorial spaces characterised by transnational territorial logics and the shared exchange of economic and symbolic resources across territorial borders, thus challenging the conventional state-centred conception of borders that merely perceives them as instruments for demarcating nation-states. More specifically, I focus on the direct communication strategies employed by RWPPs in the Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs. These RWPPs are the Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP (Swiss People's Party) and the MCG (Geneva Citizens Movement) on the Swiss side of the border and the RN (National Rally) Ain/Haute-Savoie and Haut-Rhin on the French side of the border.

Adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, this thesis establishes an original conceptual framework by linking diverse bodies of literature from the realms of political science, critical border studies, political geography and linguistics. In addition, the three empirical chapters aim to investigate right-wing populist bordering discourses through the lenses of border issues, bordering narratives and symbolic multi-scalar border framing, particularly during pivotal turning points such as the Covid-19 pandemic and sub-state cantonal elections.

The findings underscore the multiplicity of bordering discourses that unfold across various territorial scales. Based on this multiplicity and recognising that discourses cannot be fully comprehended without considering the context(s) in which they are performed, I present a framework relating to the endogenous and exogenous contextual factors that seem to influence the framing, emergence and deployment of diverse types of right-wing populist bordering discourses.

Résumé

Cette thèse a pour but d'examiner théoriquement et empiriquement la relation entre populisme de droite et frontières. A ce jour, trop peu d'études ont cherché à comprendre comment les partis populistes de droite construisent et (re)produisent les frontières par le biais de multiples échelles territoriales au sein de leurs discours, bien que le contrôle des frontières et la défense de la souveraineté territoriale semblent être des enjeux importants pour ces partis. Afin de pallier ce manque, cette thèse contribue à étudier le discours relatif aux frontières des partis populistes de droite évoluant au sein de régions transfrontalières en utilisant l'analyse critique de discours, plus précisément l'approche historique du discours. Les régions transfrontalières sont des espaces cruciaux qui promeuvent des logiques transnationales et dans lesquelles des ressources économiques autant que symboliques sont partagées au-delà des frontières territoriales, remettant ainsi en cause une approche stato-centrée des frontières comme outils délimitant les États-nations. Plus spécifiquement, j'examine ici la communication directe des partis populistes de droite évoluant dans les régions transfrontalières du Grand Genève et de l'Eurodistrict de Bâle. Les partis populistes de droite évoluant dans ces régions sont les suivants : l'UDC (Union Démocratique du Centre) de Genève, de Bâle-Ville et de Bâle-Campagne ainsi que le MCG (Mouvement Citoyens Genevois) du côté suisse de la frontière, ainsi que les sections du RN (Rassemblement National) des départements de l'Ain/Haute-Savoie et du Haut-Rhin du côté français de la frontière.

Au travers d'une perspective interdisciplinaire, cette thèse a pour but d'élaborer un cadre conceptuel original en reliant différentes littératures provenant de différents champs académiques, à savoir la science politique, les critical border studies, la géographie politique et la linguistique. De plus, les trois chapitres empiriques ont pour but d'analyser les discours produits par les partis populistes de droite relatifs aux frontières au travers des concepts de « border issues », « bordering narratives » et « symbolic multi-scalar border framing » durant des moments-clés, à savoir les contextes de la pandémie Covid-19 et des élections cantonales.

Les résultats soulignent la multiplicité des discours concernant les frontières qui sont (re)produits au travers de multiples échelles territoriales. En me basant sur le postulat que les discours ne peuvent être compris sans prendre en considération le(s) contexte(s) au sein desquels ils sont produits, j'élabore un cadre d'appréhension de ces discours par rapport aux facteurs contextuels endogènes et exogènes qui semblent contribuer à la diversité du cadrage, de l'émergence et du déploiement de différents types de discours populistes de droite relatifs aux frontières.

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Acknowledgements

This section is probably the most significant part of my thesis, at least to me. The experience of pursuing a PhD has been like riding a rollercoaster. I've gone through periods of immense excitement in learning how to interpret the world and how it works, as well as periods that felt like mental breakdowns, filled with existential questions about the true purpose of my work. Over the past four years, I've been fortunate to have tremendous opportunities to participate in various international workshops, conferences and academic gatherings, as well as the writing of a collective book, which always (re)kindled my interest and reminded me of the importance of studying the functioning of the world from an analytical perspective. I have also had the privilege of reading wonderful contributions on right-wing populism and borders, which have inspired and reinvigorated me. While I sometimes still struggle to comprehend exactly how I managed to reach the end of this weird but wonderful journey, I am sure that it is largely thanks to the many people in my life who have consistently supported me, even and especially during moments of doubt.

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To my shining stars,
Rose and Jean-Jacques,
Who may not have had the chance to study,
But taught us the most important values in life:
To laugh, to share, to give and to respect.

1. Introduction

On 8 January 2019, US President Donald Trump addressed Congress in a televised speech from the Oval Office. In his address, he called on them to fund the construction of a wall on the US–Mexico border. Here is an excerpt of his address:

> My administration has presented Congress with a detailed proposal to secure the border and stop the criminal gangs, drug smugglers and human traffickers. It's a tremendous problem. Our proposal was developed by law enforcement professionals and border agents at the Department of Homeland Security. These are the resources they have requested to properly perform their mission and keep America safe – in fact, safer than ever before. The proposal from Homeland Security includes cutting-edge technology for detecting drugs, weapons, illegal contraband and many other things. We have requested more agents, immigration judges and bed space to process the sharp rise in unlawful migration fuelled by our very strong economy (…) Finally, as part of an overall approach to border security, law enforcement professionals have requested $5.7 billion for a physical barrier. At the request of Democrats, it will be a steel barrier rather than a concrete wall. This barrier is absolutely critical to border security. It's also what our professionals at the border want and need. This is just common sense.

On 9 September 2022, in a similar speech at a swearing-in ceremony for border hunters, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán emphasised the importance of border security and justifying the construction of a fence to prevent illegal migration:

> Since 2015, a migration crisis has swept Europe. Millions of people from Africa and the Middle East have arrived illegally in Europe, in defiance of borders and laws. In Hungary, history has taught us that a country without borders is like an egg without a shell. This is why, after the crisis erupted, we Hungarians decided that – no matter what anyone said – we would not compromise our security: we defended our borders and we built a fence (…) What we want – and it is our right, our birth right – is for Hungary to remain a Hungarian country. Each passing year, ever more people try to enter Hungary across its southern borders. This year, there have been 160,000 illegal attempts, and we have good reason to believe that this number will increase further. Violence is on the rise. At first, migrants were just fighting one another, but now we are seeing Hungarians on border duty being subjected to physical threats. Migrants need to understand that there is no way that they can cross the border. And you are the ones who must make them understand this: you border hunters are the ones who will intercept them, searching for and finding

them if necessary. You are the ones who will catch them and eject them from Hungary –
every single one, with no exceptions.

These two examples illustrate the resurgence of borders as a political issue, especially in the rhetoric of right-wing populist politicians. These discursive patterns are part of a right-wing populist narrative structured around keeping one's territory "distinguished from other territories by borders that must be kept safe from the outside" (Paasi et al. 2022: 2).

Over the past few years, border policy has played an increasingly important role while also becoming more politicised and divisive. In both the USA and Europe, there has been a "growing movement toward the reassertion of borders and border control" (Schain 2019: 1). Trump's statements on the proposed construction of a wall between the US and Mexico, along with similar demands by government officials in Hungary and Austria in the wake of the migrant crisis, are prime examples. More recently, the coronavirus outbreak and the conflict in Ukraine have further contributed to returning borders to political discussions (Bobba and Hubé 2021; Lara-Valencia and Laine 2022; Radil, Castan Pinos, and Ptak 2021). As argued by Laine (2021: 182):

> Recent events around the globe and the related frequently reported expressions of neo-nationalism, populism and xenophobia, as well as border violence, may appear to refute the potential of borders to connect. Amidst the uncertainties and insecurities of the current era, accentuated further by the current Covid-19 pandemic, the role of borders as interfaces between domestic and foreign concerns, as markers of difference and as barriers to undesirable influences and foreign threats, has only been reinforced.

Although the reassertion of borders is one of the main features of the past decade, another relevant phenomenon is inextricably linked to it: the rise and success – in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere – of right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) and movements (Guriev and Papaioannou 2022; Rodrik 2020; Steele and Homolar 2019; Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017). Right-wing populist actors often promote tougher border policies to counter the threat that they allege is being posed to territorial sovereignty. It has been argued that the border is an important resource in populist discourse (Lamour and Varga 2020; Osuna 2022). RWPPs are among the actors that discursively create, shift and transform borders both materially and symbolically (Brambilla 2015; Laine 2016; Wodak 2021b). In this context, RWPPs materialise borders not only as walls providing security but also as

symbolic socio-psychological tools for differentiation when framing a Manichean division between "us" and "them" (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002).

Against this backdrop, the primary research question of this thesis is structured as follows: How do RWPPs shape and (re)produce borders through their bordering discourses? To date, the literature on right-wing populism has overlooked the issue of the discursive construction of borders. While there seems to be an elective affinity between right-wing populism (and right-wing discursive practices) and borders as border control and the defence of territorial sovereignty are important issues for RWPPs, there has been a lack of systematic theoretical and empirical research investigating how right-wing populist discourse deals with territorial borders.

This research attempts to fill the gap by providing a theoretical framework that combines political science, border studies and political geography from a linguistic perspective. This framework is used to empirically and heuristically explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders. The research takes an interdisciplinary and constructivist approach to: 1) bolster creative research by combining different literatures, 2) build new theoretical developments and 3) capture the complexity of contemporary borders through multiple perspectives (see, among others, Amilhat-Szary 2015; Brambilla et al. 2017; Konrad et al. 2018; Parizot et al. 2014). In this vein, and as it will be developed in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), borders should not be considered simply as static, magnetic lines on the map (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009; Vollmer 2021) or purely national entities (Casaglia et al. 2020; Rumford 2012). Rather, in the context of globalisation and the increasing complexity of contemporary politics, they should be considered social constructs that are formed by geographically and historically contingent discursive processes. These processes are constantly being re- and deconstructed at different levels by different actors (Diener and Hagen 2017; Laine 2016; Paasi 1999; Popescu 2012; Storey 2020).

Consequently, the thesis focuses on a cross-border perspective. A cross-border perspective is compelling, as cross-border regions (CBRs) are crucial territorial spaces to explore the overlapping of different territorial scales. The theoretical framework (Chapter 2) will describe how CBRs are embedded in transnational territorial logics in which economic and symbolic resources are shared across territorial borders (Perkmann 2007; Sohn 2016; Varol and Soylemez 2018) and where people deal on a daily basis with the cross-border mobility of people, goods, capital and services resulting from an increasing transnational integration (Jensen and Richardson 2004; Lamour 2014). CBRs comprise distinct borderlands or border

regions, located at the edges of separate nation-states and recognized as zones extending beyond the borderline due to the transnational integration they provide (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999; Rumford 2012). Although they are crucial transnational territorial spaces, they have been largely overlooked by academic studies on the discourses of RWPPs in CBRs. However, it will be argued that RWPPs in CBRs, operating in distinct borderlands from one another, must deal with multiple territorial scales to address the multiple identities and belongings of specific territorially bounded communities.

Thus, borders are not solely physical barriers, walls or fences but can also be considered spaces of transnational interaction (Guichonnet and Raffestin 1974; Raffestin 1986). In both CBRs and borderlands, in particular, borders are Janus-faced, serving simultaneously as demarcating lines of protection and gateways for cross-border transnational opportunities (Deleixhe, Dembinska and Iglesias 2019; Koch 2018). In this context, it has been argued that RWPPs operating in border regions can contextually mobilise the border as a resource to shape a common sense of belonging across the border while also using it as a tool for territorial defence against threats from the other side of the border (Biancalana and Mazzoleni 2020; 2023; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017; Lamour and Varga 2020).

Exploring right-wing populist bordering discourses in CBRs allows us to avoid mirroring and reproducing a normative and constructed nationalist image of the social world as something that can be taken for granted (i.e. methodological nationalism; see Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002) and the common-sensical pitfall of viewing the national territorial state as the container of society (i.e. the territorial trap; see Agnew 1994; 2008). Accordingly, the main focus of this research is to expand the field of political science, which remains normatively embedded in methodological nationalism and territorial trap rationales, by exploring how borders are discursively constructed (i.e. bordering discourse) across different territorial scales in an era characterised by globalisation and the multi-dimensionality of social, political, economic and cultural spaces. By sidestepping a normative, state-centred perspective, this research aims to better understand the multi-scalar territorial dimension of borders in RWPPs' discursive practices and how RWPPs discursively shape and (re)produce borders.

To explore the right-wing populist discursive construction of borders, I use the discourse historical approach (DHA), which is embedded in the critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework. In the methodological chapter (Chapter 3), I will argue that, on the one hand, CDA insists on the dialectical relationship between discourses and social reality, as

discourse is considered a social practice that creates, reproduces or changes social structures (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). On the other hand, the DHA focuses more explicitly on the historical and political dimensions of discourses by combining historical, socio-political and linguistic perspectives. In this context, discourse is understood as shaping and being shaped by social and historical changes. It is also seen as a semiotic practice (or durable products of linguistic actions) that influences the physical, social and mental aspects of the world through the outlooks of various social actors (Fairclough 2013). Importantly, CDA explicitly stresses the need for interdisciplinarity to better grasp how language constitutes and transmits knowledge, organises social institutions and contributes to exercising power. In line with this perspective, the approach aims to transcend the purely linguistic dimension of discourse by considering the contextual backgrounds in which discursive events are embedded (Weiss and Wodak 2003).

Taking the contextual backgrounds into consideration is an important asset of the CDA, as this approach considers the contextual functions of language use as closely interlinked with the discourse production *per se* in a dialectical fashion (Wodak and Meyer 2016). Thus, by specifically considering the historical, political, social, economic and cultural contexts in which right-wing populist discourses are embedded, the DHA helps to gain a better understanding of how right-wing populist discursive practices influence and are influenced by the institutions and situations to which they belong. It will be argued that RWPPs depend on and must adapt to the contextual opportunities and constraints affecting their discursive practices (Heinisch, Holtz-Bacha, and Mazzoleni 2021; Scott 2020b; Wirth et al. 2016).

I investigate the direct party communication of RWPPs in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs, analysing discourses from parties' Facebook posts, tweets, official newspapers, official releases and electoral manifestos.[1] The RWPPs under investigation are the Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country sub-state cantonal branches of the Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP), the Geneva Citizens Movement (Mouvement Citoyens Genevois, MCG) and the National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN) sub-state local branches of Ain/Haute-Savoie and Haut-Rhin operating in the broader Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Grand-Est regions. These RWPPs are considered

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[1] All discursive examples provided in the empirical chapters have been translated into English. The source language for the examples stemming from the discourses of the Geneva SVP, MCG, RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and Haut-Rhin was French, while the source language for the examples stemming from the discourses of the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP was German.

relevant and successful on the European political landscape (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016a; Mudde 2007; van Kessel 2015). Moreover, the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs are among the best-integrated regions in Europe, given the strong cross-border employment dynamics they display (Decoville et al. 2013; Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Sohn 2020). At the same time, I will argue in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4) that the varying levels of socio-economic developments on both sides of the border represent a fertile ground for RWPPs to (re)configure borders as tools to delimit, distinguish and reject people from their territories (Herzog and Sohn 2014).

The thesis is organised as follows. By linking political science, border studies and political geography from a linguistic perspective, Chapter 2 presents an interdisciplinary and constructivist framework aimed at reflecting on the elective affinity between right-wing populism and borders. Chapter 3 focuses on the study's methodological aspects by demonstrating how the linguistic and rhetorical analytical tools provided by the DHA help to better grasp the RWPPs' discursive construction of borders. Chapter 4 examines the contextual backgrounds in which the RWPPs operate. This is crucial for understanding how contextual dynamics have provided the parties with different political and institutional opportunities and constraints that, in turn, influence their political mobilisation and competition, as well as the discursive construction of borders. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 empirically explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders. Chapter 5 focuses on the right-wing populist discursive construction of border issues in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs in the months following the outbreak of Covid-19 from a comparative perspective, while Chapter 6 investigates the discursive construction of bordering narratives in the Geneva borderland during the pandemic by exploring and comparing the discourses of the Geneva SVP and the MCG. Chapter 7 provides an analysis of the symbolic multi-scalar discursive construction of borders, or the symbolic multi-scalar border framing, during sub-state elections by exploring two different case studies, the Geneva and Basel borderlands. The pandemic context in Chapters 5 and 6 was selected for analysis as it represented a crucial moment of rupture, with the partial closure of state borders providing RWPPs with new opportunities to fetishise borders as tools to protect territorial sovereignty and reinforce spatial aspects of identity (Casaglia et al. 2020). In addition, the context of sub-state cantonal elections in Chapter 7 was selected as it represented a crucial moment for RWPPs to provide the official positions of their political agendas on specific issues (Braun and Schmitt 2020). Finally, Chapter 8 provides

concluding remarks on the main findings of this research, lessons learned to explore right-wing populist discourses in CBRs and the limitations of the thesis. It also offers some insights for a future research agenda.

Importantly, the three empirical chapters (5–7) have been published. Chapters 5 and 7 have been published in a collective book entitled "National Populism and Borders. The Politicisation of Cross-border Mobilisations in Europe" (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), which I co-wrote with Oscar Mazzoleni, Cecilia Biancalana, Andrea Pilotti, Laurent Bernhard and Lukas Lauener. Chapter 5 is based on a chapter that I co-wrote with Cecilia Biancalana entitled "The politicisation of borders in national-populist discourse: Geneva and Ticino during the Covid-19 Pandemic" (pp. 17-36). Unlike that contribution, Chapter 5 in this dissertation focuses specifically on the use of border issues in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs. Chapter 7 of this thesis is based on a chapter that I wrote entitled "Framing the people and the elites: two models of national-populist border politicisation. The case of the Geneva and Basel cross-border regions" (pp. 55-77). In Chapter 7, I deepen the analysis by exploring how the jumping scale strategy unfolds through distinct spaces of dependence and engagement. In addition, I expand the theoretical framework by introducing the interest rescaling thesis, which examines how different models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing could emerge, depending on whether RWPPs provide a regional right-wing populist discourse with or without regionalism, according to the "regionalisation" degree of interests. Finally, Chapter 6 is based on a peer-reviewed article that I published in the Swiss Political Science Review entitled "Right-wing populist bordering narratives in times of crisis: Anti-immigration discourse in the Genevan borderland during the Covid-19 pandemic" (April 2022). In this thesis, the chapter provides additional empirical illustrations and theoretically deepens the reflection on the border–migration nexus.

Finally, this thesis is part of a project entitled "The right-wing populist discourse in European cross-border areas. A comparison between Switzerland and Luxembourg", which is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Luxembourg National Research Fund. The project examines the discourses produced by RWPPs operating in European CBRs regarding spatial bordering.

2. The Elective Affinity between Right-Wing Populism and Borders: A Conceptual Framework

Research into populism, on the one hand, and political geography and border studies, on the other hand, has followed separate paths in academic research (Casaglia et al. 2020; Lizotte 2019). The goal of this thesis is to construct an original conceptual framework that helps to empirically and heuristically explore the discursive construction of borders in cross-border regions (CBRs) by RWPPs. To this end, the thesis brings together the literatures of different academic disciplines. To understand how borders "are based on and feed into populist discourses and attitudes" (Osuna 2022: 1), a fuller comprehension of borders within the field of populism is crucial. The emphasis on right-wing populism is justified as it is widely recognised that RWWPs fuel bordering agendas focused on the erosion of territorial sovereignty that results from porous borders and inadequate homeland security (Paasi et al. 2022).

As explained in the introduction, this theoretical framework aims to connect political science, border studies and political geography from a linguistic perspective in order to capture the complexity of contemporary borders. As argued by Brambilla et al. (2017: 1), this approach is necessary to encourage "a productive understanding of the processual, de-territorialised and disperse nature of borders and their ensuring regimes in the era of globalisation and transnational flows as well as showcasing border research as an interdisciplinary field". On the one hand, Casaglia et al. (2020: 1) state that "the contribution of political geography and border studies to the analysis of populism has been limited, even though borders, sovereignty, globalization, and inequality are crucial elements mobilized by the current wave of populism". On the other hand, academic research in political science has paid little attention to borders, even though it is argued that they both consist of and constitute populist discourses (Osuna 2022). As a result, academic research combining political science, political geography and border studies to explore the discursive construction of borders by RWPPs remains scarce in the literature. Against this background, this thesis aims to connect the field of political science to other crucial academic fields in an interdisciplinary way in order to understand the mutually formative forces of right-wing

populism, on the one hand, and borders, on the other hand. Political science – and, more specifically, the study of party politics and right-wing populism – has been normatively locked into a nationalist perspective, with political parties widely considered as agents of state nationalism that shape their politics across the national territorial scale (Deschouwer 2006; Heinisch, Massetti, and Mazzoleni 2020; Mazzoleni 2005; León and Scantamburlo 2022); thus, a more subtle understanding of the complexity of contemporary multi-scalar territorial and political configurations is still lacking.

In the context of globalisation and the increasing complexity of contemporary politics, recent developments in critical border studies have revealed that borders do not merely relate to a magnetic line that corresponds to the geo-political line of separation between nation-states (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Vollmer 2021). According to Brambilla et al. (2017: 1), "while borders continue to have considerable relevance today, there are ways in which we need to revisit them in light of constantly changing historical, political and social contexts, grasping their shifting and undetermined nature in space and time". Borders are intrinsically ambivalent, as Perrier Bruslé (2013: 21) reveals: "the border can be porous, as a heritage of a region of miscegenation. It can be open to facilitate the movement of goods and human beings within the continental integration process promoted by a supranational and national organisation. And it can be closed, as a bulwark of the nation." Hence, borders involve "practices of differentiation, protection and control but also of openness, hybridization and inventiveness" (Sohn 2016: 184) and, therefore, represent not only barriers, walls and fences but also areas of interaction (Guichonnet and Raffestin 1974; Raffestin 1986). Accordingly, there is a need to grasp borders from a constructivist perspective, that is, as social constructs resulting from discursive processes that are geographically and historically contingent (Diener and Hagen 2017; Paasi 1999; Popescu 2012; Storey 2020) and as multifaceted social institutions that are re- and deconstructed through discourse at different levels and by different actors (Laine 2016).

At the same time, the understanding of the nature of contemporary borders is closely linked to the concepts of territory, sovereignty and scales. In this vein, studies in political geography have acknowledged that territories relate to complex entities competing on multiple political and geographical scales relating to the multi-territorial dimensionality of space (Cox 2008). Furthermore, as argued by Paasi et al. (2022), the concepts of borders, territory and sovereignty are intrinsically linked insofar as they give meaning to each other. Borders are intended to delimit territorial sovereign power and produce new forms of

territorialisation. Thus, and as demonstrated by Anderson and O'Dowd (1999: 594), "the significance of borders derives from the importance of territoriality as an organizing principle of political and social life". As a result, borders become loci for RWPPs to practically and symbolically take (back) control, that is, to put territorial and sovereigntist claims at the vanguard of their ideological and political discourses (Basile and Mazzoleni 2020).

The driving force behind this research is to understand how RWPPs discursively (re)produce and shape territorial borders[2] across multiple scales in their bordering discourses. According to Lizotte (2019: 140), there is a need "to continue to work towards a geographically-grounded approach to populism that accounts for how populist politics mobilizes material and symbolic grievances through narratives about place". In this vein, political parties will be considered actors who can use discourse to (re)produce socio-political meanings and symbolic interpretations of territorial borders through constructed imaginaries (Brambilla 2015; Wodak 2021b). The linguistic perspective aims to link the concepts of populism, borders, territory, sovereignty and scales through the common thread of discourse as a crucial component to explore the discursive practices of RWPPS in constructing territorial borders. This common thread is essential for 1) enacting populism as a graded process, 2) understanding the everyday socio-political construction of borders, and 3) (re)producing a spatialised understanding of territories and territorial sovereignties across various territorial scales. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to gain a better understanding of the perspectives and practices of people involved in border politics and border practices, thus enabling a better grasp of the *practice of bordering* (Vollmer 2017a).

The study of how RWPPs evolve in CBRs is largely absent from academic research yet essential because such regions represent "contested spaces which must satisfy opposing interests, such as balancing economic actor's demands for free movement of capital, labour and goods with demands for border security" (Koch 2018: 2). Thus, they epitomise an encouraging vantage point as they cultivate fertile ground for RWPPs to increase tensions in politicising the political, social, cultural and economic differentials and grievances relating to their multi-scalar and transnational territorial nature (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Gumy, Drevon, and Kaufmann 2022). In addition, as post-national

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[2] The lexical use of "borders" and "territorial borders" in this research refer to the same theoretical background, as borders *per se* are considered territorial configurations dividing space at different geographical scales and delimiting sovereign powers (Paasi et al. 2022).

entities, CBRs represent peculiar spaces of mobilisation where political parties must adapt and respond to several loci of decision making at different territorial levels (Mazzoleni 2017; Perrier Bruslé 2013; Sassen 2006).

The chapter is organised as follows. The first section provides a literature review of the heterogeneous definitions of populism. The second section defines right-wing populism for the purposes of this research. The third section offers an original theoretical and interdisciplinary framework to empirically and heuristically explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders in European CBRs – firstly, by conceptualising borders as discursive social constructs; secondly, by advocating the intertwined relation between the concepts of borders, territory, sovereignty and scales; and thirdly, by demonstrating how right-wing populism and borders can be considered, more generally, a magnetic nexus that is intrinsically and fundamentally intertwined and helps to grasp the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the ongoing political dynamics. In conclusion, the final section summarises the main theoretical developments of the chapter and outlines the contributions of this theoretical framework for the field of political science. It emphasises the importance of adopting a constructivist and interdisciplinary framework when exploring RWPPs' discursive construction of borders in CBRs. The section highlights how combining distinct academic literatures is crucial in improving the understanding of how right-wing populist bordering discourses unfold.

2.1. What is Populism? Navigating a Heterogeneous Concept

In the modern body of scholarship, the first attempt to reflect on populism and foster dialogue between scholars from various fields can be traced to the seminal publication of Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (1969) entitled *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*. This publication resulted from a conference hosted by the authors at the London School of Economics in 1968 to reflect on the concept of populism. As introduced by the authors in this contribution, the book aims to clarify the core aspects of populism:

> There can, at present, be no doubt about the importance of populism. But no one is quite clear just what it is. As a doctrine or as a movement, it is elusive and protean. It

> bobs up everywhere, but in many and contradictory shapes. Does it have any underlying unity, or does a name cover a multitude of unconnected tendencies? (Ionescu and Gellner 1969: 1)

However, this collective contribution did not attempt to provide a hegemonic definition of the concept, as the contributors to the volume define populism either as an ideology, a political movement or a political syndrome. Shortly afterwards, at the beginning of the 1980s, Margaret Canovan (1981) published an influential book entitled *Populism* in which she attempted to draft a comprehensive overview and a pioneer typology of the concept:[3]

> Clarification is urgently needed, and this book represents an attempt at providing it. Given the enormous scope of the subject and the range over which the term is used, any such attempt must lie open to charges of superficiality in the various field touched on. If, however, we can contrive to sort out the bewildering phenomena of populism into a reasonably coherent pattern, the effort may be justified. (Canovan 1981: 6-7)

Margaret Canovan underscores two universal components of populism: the exaltation and appeal to the "people" and a form of anti-elitism. She also emphasises that the study of populist manifestations should not be separated from the context in which they emerge. Besides, in his contribution entitled *Populism*, Paul Taggart (2000) outlines some of the central features of the concept – among others, it empowers an idealised community, is hostile to representative politics, comes in reaction to a sense of crisis, is an episodic response to patterns of representative politics and is chameleonic (i.e. it adopts the colours of its environment).

Since the 1990s, scholarly attention on populism has flourished, especially within the field of political science. However, the struggle for a hegemonic definition of the concept continues to be hotly debated in the literature. At the same time, the consensus that populism expresses a restoration of power to the "real" or "true" people (i.e. popular sovereignty or a demand for the primacy of the people) in opposition to the "elites" or the "establishment"

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[3] Based on various "classical" historical events, Canovan (1981: 13) draws seven types of populism divided into three "agrarian" and four "political" populisms: 1) farmers' radicalism (e.g. the US People's Party), 2) peasant movement (e.g. the East European Green Rising), 3) intellectual agrarian socialism (e.g. the *narodniki*), 4) populist dictatorship (e.g. Perón), 5) populist democracy (e.g. calls for referenda and "participation"), 6) reactionary populism (e.g. George Wallace and his supporters) and 7) politician's populism (i.e. the broad, non-ideological coalition-building that draws on a unifying appeal to the people).

as emphasised by Canovan (1981) seems to be broadly accepted (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Rooduijn 2014).

There are myriad conceptual definitions of populism, and they range from ideational and discursive to stylistic or strategic ones. According to Heinisch, Holtz-Bacha, and Mazzoleni (2021: 21), these different approaches depend on "the way populism has been concretely experienced in distinct historical, political and social contexts". The following paragraphs aim to give insights into the most widespread definitions found in the literature. Additionally, I will provide the definition of populism that I will use in this dissertation to explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders.

In his seminal and ideational approach, Cas Mudde (2004: 543) defines populism as a thin-centred ideology[4] "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* of the people". According to this approach, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) describe the essence of the populist Manichean division as being based on morality, as populists define the people through their purity in contrast with corrupt elites allegedly working against the general will of the people.

From another perspective, Kurt Weyland (2001: 14) defines populism as a political strategy in which "a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalised support from large numbers of unorganized followers". Weyland conceptualises populism as a way of competing and exercising political power through domination, especially by using economic and social policies as an instrument to rescue people from crises, threats and enemies.

Extending the definitions of Margaret Canovan (1984) and Pierre-André Taguieff (1995),[5] Benjamin Moffitt (2016) conceptualises populism as a political style relating to the mediatised milieu of contemporary politics. In his view, a political style can be defined as

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[4] According to Freeden (1998: 750), a thin-centred ideology "is one that arbitrarily severs itself from wider ideational contexts, by the deliberate removal and replacement of concepts. The consequence is a structural inability to offer complex ranges of argument, because many chains of ideas one would normally expect to find stretching from the general and abstract to concrete and practical, from the core to the periphery, as well as in the reverse direction, are simply absent."

[5] Canovan (1984: 314) defines populism as "a matter of style rather than substance", while Taguieff (1995: 9) describes it as "a type of social and political mobilization, which means that the term can only designate a dimension of political action or discourse. It does not embody a particular type of political regime, nor does it define a particular ideological content. It is a political style applicable to various ideological frameworks."

"the repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life" (Ibid.: 7). Accordingly, this approach considers not only the rhetorical but also the aesthetic and performative elements (e.g. self-representation and body language as core features of populist manifestations) found in populism.

In turn, Jagers and Walgrave (2007: 323) define populism as a political communication style tied to the people: "By referring to the people, a political actor claims that he or she cares about the people's concerns, that he or she primarily wants to defend the interests of the people, that he or she is not alienated from the public but knows what the people really want". The authors further conceptualise both thin and thick forms of populism: While the former defines the desire to be close to people by talking directly to them, the latter represents a combination of thin populism with anti-establishment and homogeneity/exclusion features. From this perspective, they develop a fourfold typology to measure populism quantitatively.[6]

Nadia Urbinati (2019) and Yves Mény and Yves Surel (2002), among others, conceptualise populism as being closely intertwined with the concept of (liberal) democracy. On the one hand, Mény and Surel (2002: 17-18) define populism as a pathology of democracy: "Populism is a warning signal about the defects, limits and weakness of representative systems. Despite its often unpleasant tones, it may constitute an effective reminder that democracy is not a given, but is instead a constant enterprise of adjustment to the changing needs and values of society." On the other hand, Urbinati (2019: 124) considers populism a response to the transformations of modern democracy: "Populism in power is a new form of mixed government, in which one part of the population achieves a preeminent power over the other(s), and that it competes with constitutional democracy in conjoining a specific representation of the people and the sovereignty of the people."

According to De la Torre and Mazzoleni (2019: 95), populism is a chameleon-like and complex phenomenon that can be understood as a mixture of a "strategy to get to power and to govern, simultaneously as a political and performative style, and as a set of ideas and

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[6] Their fourfold typology comprises: 1) empty populism (i.e. the appeal to the people), 2) anti-elitist populism (i.e. the appeal to the people combined with anti-elitism), 3) excluding populism (i.e. the appeal to the people combined with homogeneity/exclusion) and 4) complete populism (i.e. the appeal to the people combined with both anti-elitism and homogeneity/exclusion) (Jagers and Walgrave 2007: 334-335).

discourses about politics". With this definition, the authors attempt to escape from normativity by considering the diverse manifestations of populism relating to the historical contexts in which they arise.

To gain a more nuanced understanding of populism through a graded approach that considers the varying degrees of intensity in the unfolding of populist manifestations and to better understand the contextual construction of the people and the elites, I argue that it is essential to conceptualise populism by combining the definitions of Aslanidis (2016) and Laclau (2005), who view populism primarily as a discourse. After presenting both approaches, I will explain why such an understanding should be adopted for the purposes of this thesis.

According to Aslanidis (2016: 96), populism is a *discursive frame* in which discourse represents a conceptual genus: "populism modestly becomes a discourse, invoking the supremacy of popular sovereignty to claim that corrupt elites are defrauding the people of their rightful political authority. It becomes an anti-elite discourse in the name of the sovereign people". In this sense, populism is not merely considered a dichotomous process but becomes a matter of degree depending on contextual factors. Furthermore, this *discursive frame* is part of a more general *populist frame* diagnosis in which "corrupt elites have unjustly usurped the sovereign authority of the noble people" and which "maintains that the solution to the problem resides in the righteous political mobilisation of the latter in order to regain power" (Ibid.: 99).

By contrast, Laclau (2005: 43) defines populism as a discourse, a "series of politico discursive practices constructing a popular subject, and the precondition of the emergence of such a subject is the building up of an internal frontier dividing the social space into two camps". For the author, populism resides in the political articulation of social identities within discourses through the construction of equivalential chains[7] and their related empty signifiers.[8] The categories of "people" and/or "power" will typically represent these empty

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[7] Laclau (2005: 37-38) defines equivalential chains as an aggregation of individual demands (popular subjectivity) based on dissatisfaction and as part of a larger set of social demands leading to populism: "a situation in which a plurality of unsatisfied demands and an increasing inability of the institutional system to absorb them differentially co-exist, creates the conditions leading to a populist ruptures."

[8] According to Laclau (2005: 40), the equivalential logic is intertwined with the construction of empty signifiers as both enriching and impoverishing: "Enriching: the signifiers unifying an equivalential chain, because they must cover all the link integrating the latter, have a wider reference than a purely differential

signifiers in the populist rhetoric. As such, populists build a political and internal frontier between the people/power dichotomy as social constructs. The more equivalential logics are built on this dichotomy, the more a discourse will become populist.

By combining the definitions above, I outline populism as follows: Populism represents a discourse in which an internal frontier between the empty signifiers of the "people" (or "us", the "real people", the "sovereign people") and the "others" (i.e. the "elites", the "establishment" or "other scapegoats") is built up by strengthening the connections between people's disenchantment (i.e. by consolidating the equivalential chains of social demands). Furthermore, the content of these empty signifiers varies according to historical and geographical contexts (i.e. according to the *populist frame,* in which context-dependent opportunities and constraints lead to political mobilisations aiming to return power to the "real" people) and operates in a *discursive frame* in which an anti-elitist discourse is constructed to solve the disenchantment and the common problems the sovereign people have to endure (see Figure 2.1).

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content which would attach a signifier to just one signified. Impoverishing: precisely because of this wider (potentially universal) reference, its connection with particular contents tends to be drastically reduced."

Figure 2.1 – The articulation of populism: Connecting the definitions by Aslanidis (2016) with Laclau (2005)
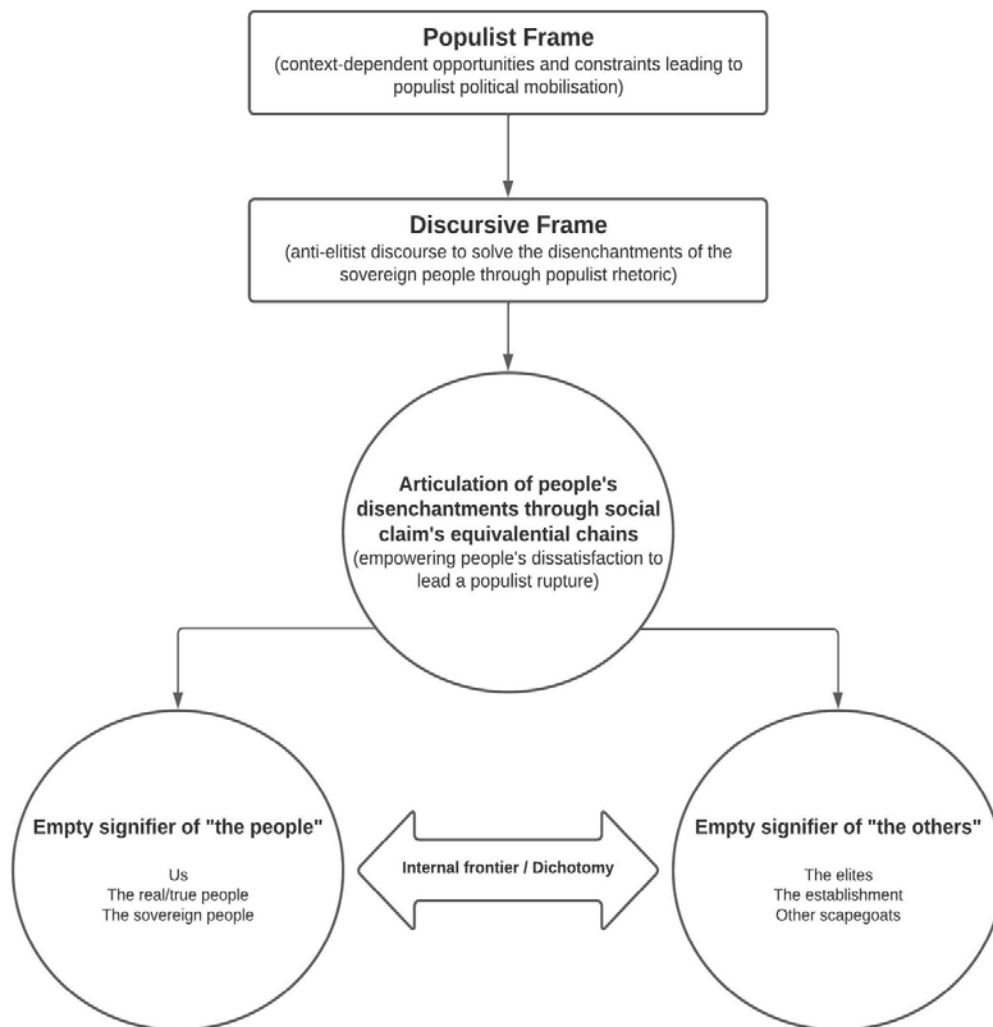
Source: Author

I argue that this definition is effective in capturing how populist parties discursively shape in- and out-groups in a Manichean perspective, thereby contributing to the creation of socially constructed borders that are flexible and situationally influenced through populist imaginaries. This constructivist approach avoids normativity and reductionism by considering populism as a matter of degree rather than a dichotomous process *per se* where political parties are classified as either populist or non-populist (see Aslanidis 2016). Therefore, as this perspective is intended to explore the varying intensity of populist discursive manifestations, it complements the various definitions of populism provided earlier. For instance, it allows for measuring the degree of ideology, exercise of political power, performance mediation, communication style and the use of language to threaten democracy.

Against this backdrop, discourse is intended as a socially constituted and constitutive semiotic practice that can create, reproduce or change social reality (Reisigl 2017). Populist parties can use the discourse to construct symbolic, ideological, political and social meanings (Berger and Luckmann 1991). Understanding populism through this framework allows us to capture how endogenous and exogenous conditions influence and are influenced by social reality. While the endogenous conditions define the abilities, resources and structural assets that RWPPs use to discursively shape borders, the exogenous conditions refer to the influence of the context (varying through time and space) in which RWPPs evolve and how this context influences the discursive construction of borders (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021; Vollmer 2021). Indeed, and as argued by De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017), populism is not a pre-existing political project but discursively constructed as a category fulfilled with the articulation of meanings present in discourses that, in turn, build social reality.

2.2. What about Right-Wing Populism? Outlining a Definition

Since the 1980s, there has been a growing debate around the cultural and socio-economic factors explaining the rise and success of RWPPs in Western Europe (see Kallis 2018; Manucci and Weber 2017; Hafez 2014; Schain, Zolberg, and Hossay 2002; Zúquete 2015). However, right-wing populism appears to be particularly associated with economic insecurity and cultural anxiety triggered by globalisation (among others, see Beurskens 2022; Shehaj, Shin, and Inglehart 2021; Skenderovic 2007). Moreover, the increasing numbers of foreigners, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers seem to have had an impact on the electoral success of RWPPs, which has been boosted by domestic factors like economic competition, growing unemployment and inequality (Rydgren 2008; Van Rossem and Roose 2022).

Immigration, globalisation and neoliberalism, in particular, have contributed to the creation of "losers of globalisation" – that is, specific segments of Western societies, including unskilled workers, the unemployed, those dependent on welfare and parts of the lower middle class, who strongly support RWPPs. These "losers of globalisation" feel

threatened by the profound transformations and modernisation of Western Europe and the associated economic, cultural and political competition that is on the rise (Arzheimer 2018; Fortunato and Pecoraro 2022; Kriesi et al. 2008; Van Rossem and Roose 2022).[9]

There is a consensus in the literature that RWPPs frame nativist and conservative values with an exclusionary vision of the nation (and the national identity) based on ethnonationalism and xenophobia (Betz 1994; Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Rydgren 2018; Zaid and Joshi 2018). From a linguistic perspective, the right-wing populist rhetoric can be introduced as follows:

> Populist rhetoric directs tribal grievances "upwards" toward elites, feeding mistrusts of "corrupt" politicians, the "fake" media, "biased" judges, and "out-of-touch" mainstream parties, assaulting the truth and corroding faith in liberal democracy. Politicians won't/can't defend you. And authoritarians channel tribal grievances "outwards" toward scapegoat groups perceived as threatening the values and norms of the in-group, dividing "Us" (the "real people") and "Them" ("Not Us"); stoking anxiety, corroding mutual tolerance, and poisoning the reservoir of social trust. If the world is seen as full of gangs, criminals, and fanatics, if our borders are vulnerable to drug cartels, Muslim terrorists, and illegal aliens, if liberal democracy is broken, then logically we need high walls – and strong leaders – to protect us and our nation. (Norris and Inglehart 2019: 7)

The discursive representation of the people as a homogeneous and undifferentiated community favours this exclusionary vision of the nation (Deiwiks 2009; Manucci and Weber 2017; Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2014; Taguieff 1995). Thus, RWPPs perpetuate a Manichean and antagonistic division between an idealised "us" and dangerous "others" (or "them") through a romanticised construction of the past that aims to bring ancient values back into the contemporary world (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Blokker 2022; Taggart 2000). As empty signifiers, "us" can act for the true, good and upright people who are represented and supported by RWPPs and "them" for the bad, fake and dangerous enemies *up there* (including elites, politicians, upper classes and fake media), *out there* (e.g. asylum seekers, economic refugees or welfare tourists) and *down there* (e.g. spongers, parasites or the work-shy) (Wodak 2021b: 9). This dichotomous essentialisation of two

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[9] As argued by Kriesi et al. (2008: 5-8), economic competition arises through deregulation, massive immigration and delocalisation, while cultural competition is defined by the challenging and institutionalised presence of immigrant cultures, and political competition emerges from a reduction of the state's autonomy relating to supranational integration.

homogeneous blocs of "us" and "them" leads to a narrative of threats and betrayal "accusing the so-called 'establishment' of having intentionally or subconsciously neglected the so-called 'people', having instead pursued only their own interests, thus failing to protect the people and to voice their interests, and having ignored the obvious anxieties of the people" (Ibid.: 8).

This Manichean, antagonistic representation of "us" and "them" echoes the seminal contribution of Benedict Anderson (2006) and his concept of an *imagined community*. He defines the nation as follows:

> It [the nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (Anderson 2006: 7)

Defining the nation as an *imagined community* or a cultural artefact that is socially and mentally constructed and legitimised through emotional stances is crucial for RWPPs to perpetuate the construction of a homogeneous people as an organic community that shares a common sense of time, space, language and customs (De Cleen 2017). The sense of belonging to a perceived entity is based on a shared image of a national political community existing across a territorial space and over time through a common heritage of the past (Canovan 2005; Wodak 2021a). In this sense, Griffin (1993) points out that the nation is perceived as being unique and distinctive in cultural, constitutional, historical, geographical, religious, linguistic and ethnic terms. As argued by Billig (1995: 8), this represents the construction of a *banal nationalism* where the "citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations" through political discourses and cultural products. From this perspective, RWPPs construct "a non-existent ethno-national purity to defend it against those who seem to jeopardize such fictitious purity. But as long as there is a tendency to believe in the non-existent homogeneity of 'us', there is enough energy to defend 'us' against 'them'" (Pelinka 2013: 8).

In this regard, the discursive construction of the homogeneous community is emphasised through (1) *nativist body politics* or the idea that the nation (or the heartland/fatherland/homeland) must be protected against internal and outside threats (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). This notion is intertwined with (2) the *politics of fear* expressed by RWPPs and described as the "fear of strangers related to vehement nativist

nationalism built on the populist myth of a quasi-homogeneous nation-state which has to be preserved and protected against (usually fictive) external or internal dangers" (Wodak 2021b: 45), as well as (3) the *politics of insecurity*, intended as "the construction of collective insecurity, which can be defined as a shared state of anxiety or fear stemming from perceived internal or external threat" (Béland 2020: 164). Furthermore, RWPPs tend to exploit voters' anger to exacerbate their frustration and disenchantment, present themselves as the true saviours and representatives of the people and the saviours of genuine democracy through (4) the *politics of emotion and resentment* (Betz 2002; Freistein, Gadinger, and Unrau 2022; Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2017).

Accordingly, the homogeneous and undifferentiated national, cultural and economic community excludes those who do not belong to it (Deiwiks 2009; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2019). This can be defined as *identity politics* (5), which RWPPs use to ideologically justify the selective exclusion of specific groups as a threat to the values, way of life and cultural integrity of the indigenous people (Betz and Johnson 2004; Schain, Zolberg, and Hossay 2002). Immigration issues – relating to nationalism, neo-racism and xenophobia – are a crucial element of the RWPPs' political agenda. While nationalism aims to defend the exclusivity of citizenship by associating it with national political and social rights, neo-racism involves the normalisation of the incommensurability of different cultural identities (cultural relativism), and xenophobia amplifies negative emotional reactions (e.g. fear and hate) to immigrants and other marginalised groups (Skenderovic 2007). According to Taguieff (1993: 101), RWPPs provide a *differentialist racism*, that is, the willingness "to preserve collective identities (and inter-communitarian differences) at all costs. It is haunted by the threat of the destruction of identities through inter-breeding – physical and cultural cross-breeding." Therefore, and as argued by Schain (2019: 19), RWPPs consider immigration "a challenge to internal security and identity, and as a danger to the general security of the state".

Besides mobilising (1) *nativist body politics*, (2) *politics of fear*, (3) *politics of insecurity*, (4) *politics of emotions and resentments* and (5) *identity politics*, RWPPs also frame (6) *economic politics and policies* relating to welfare chauvinism and economic protectionism: "Whereas welfare state chauvinism is about protecting the welfare state against the external threat of immigrants, economic protectionism is about protecting the country against the external threat of unregulated free trade" (Otjes et al. 2018: 274). Altogether, these different forms of politics lead to a sovereigntist rhetoric of taking back

control (Kallis 2018), as RWPPs aim "to regain control over the national economy, decision making and traditions, in the face of globalized flows and supranational powers" (Basile and Mazzoleni 2020: 155). Indeed, this is part of the RWPPs' desire to provide more law and order, harmony and security and a return to rigid moral standards (Ignazi 2003) by advocating that they are the voice of ordinary citizens and advocates of a silent majority allegedly victimised by multiculturalism and political correctness (Betz 2018).

Most importantly, when examining right-wing populism, it is very important to consider the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Manichean antagonism of "us" and "them". According to Brubaker (2017), the vertical axis defines the people in opposition to the economic, political and cultural elite (top dimension) or the parasites, spongers and deviants who are not decent hard-working people (bottom dimension). By contrast, the horizontal axis defines people on an inside/outside basis. The "people" rely on a homogeneous, culturally or ethnically bounded collectivity threatened by outside groups or forces.

On the vertical top-dimension axis, the "others" can be defined as the elite or the establishment comprising the political, cultural, economic and intellectual elites (e.g. governing or established parties, the establishment, the media, experts, journalists, intellectuals, scholars and the upper classes), whom RWPPs blame for Europeanisation and mass migration and for being in favour of foreign influence, foreigners and selling out their country's sovereignty to supranational associations (Basile and Mazzoleni 2020; Pelinka 2013; Wodak 2017; Rydgren 2018). On the vertical bottom-dimension axis, the "others" can be defined as the losers (e.g. parasites, spongers, deviants, the work-shy and minorities) (Brubaker 2017; Wodak 2021b). Finally, on the horizontal dimension, the "others" can be defined as threatening outside groups (e.g. asylum seekers, economic refugees, welfare tourists, Islamists, strangers and Muslims) (Wodak 2017; 2021b). These different categories of "others" are blamed by mobilising, in turn, narratives of threat, betrayal and fear, and they are presented as a danger to the "real" people (portrayed as the authentic voice of democracy), depending on the specific political agendas and interests of the RWPPs (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 – The logic of horizontal and vertical dimensions in right-wing populism

INSIDE

THEM / THE OTHERS
governing parties, establishment, media, experts, journalists, intellectuals, scholars, upper classes

Narratives of threat and betrayal
Politics of emotions and resentments /
Politics of insecurity

Top-dimension

OUTSIDE

Narratives of threat and fear
Nativist body politics / Politics of fear / Identity politics
Economic politics / Politics of Insecurity

US / WE
The true, good and real people represented by RWPPs

Horizontal dimension

THEM / THE OTHERS
asylum seekers, economic refugees, welfare tourists, Islamists, strangers, Muslims

Narratives of threat
Politics of emotions and resentments /
Politics of insecurity

Bottom dimension

THEM / THE OTHERS
parasites, spongers, deviants, work-shy, minorities

Source: Author

RWPPs play a significant role as crisis performers to maintain and perform a Manichean antagonism between "us" and "them". Moffitt (2015: 210) argues this point as follows:

> [Crises] are actively mediated and performed by populist actors who attempt to spectacularize failure to propagate a sense of crisis […] This performance allows populists a method for dividing the people against a dangerous other, for presenting themselves as the sovereign voice of the people and for radically simplifying political procedures and institutions.

By focusing on the earlier work of Laclau (2005), who considers crisis a necessary external trigger for the emergence of populism, Benjamin Moffitt provides a framework that views crisis as part of the internal logic of populism. Populist parties operate as actors performing and perpetuating a sense of crisis by spectacularising systemic failures that become politically, ideologically and historically mediated. They present themselves as the "true" and only voices of the people. Populist parties opportunistically identify and discursively

propagate a sense of crisis to enhance the construction of the antagonistic dichotomy between the people, the elites and others. Some authors have recently focused on populist parties as crisis performers. For instance, Roberts (2022) illustrates how the Trump administration discursively used the Covid-19 pandemic to perpetuate a sense of crisis by pointing to political rivals, medical and scientific experts and the media as forces undermining the presidency in an anti-establishment populist frame. From another perspective, Bobba and Hubé (2021) show how European RWPPs successfully benefited from Covid-19 to discursively frame and perpetuate a sense of crisis by focusing on anti-elitist and exclusionist agendas, depending on contextual opportunities and constraints, and whether they were in government or in opposition. Furthermore, Casaglia and Coletti (2021) stress how RWPPs typically use crises and related emergencies to defend their territorial interests and how Covid-19 has been crucial in perpetuating bordering discourses on this matter.

Finally, as I argued in the previous section, discourse can materially create, reproduce or change social reality (Reisigl 2017). However, the material impact of RWPPs' discourse on social reality remains controversial in the literature (see Carvalho 2016). There is also empirical evidence suggesting that RWPPs can significantly influence agenda setting, voting behaviour and public policies, among others. These political outcomes can be influenced by the materialisation, institutionalisation and enactment of RWPPs' discourses (Fairclough 2005; Wodak and KhosraviNik 2013). However, the degree of impact varies depending on factors such as whether RWPPs are in government or opposition (see Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Bobba and Hubé 2021) or contextual opportunities and constraints (see Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021; Mazzoleni 2008; Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel 2018; Skenderovic and Mazzoleni 2007).

Firstly, it has been argued that RWPPs can have a major impact by mainstreaming exclusionist agenda settings (Krzyzanowski 2020; Liebhart 2020). For instance, Wodak (2015; 2021) shows how RWPPs normalise xenophobic and racist rhetoric, not only in public debates but also by influencing mainstream political parties to adopt such agenda settings to remain electorally successful. As a result, RWPPs contribute to shifting the entire political spectrum to the right.

Secondly, when considering RWPPs' impact on voting behaviour, some studies demonstrate that RWPPs can adapt their discourses to attract new voters (Mudde 2004; Norris 2005; Wirth et al. 2016; Wirz et al. 2019). For instance, as argued by Betz and

Oswald (2021), the right-wing populist discourse centred around the politics of resentment and disenchantment with mainstream politics is a major trigger for attracting new "forgotten" constituencies, particularly when RWPPs exacerbate anti-establishment and negative sentiments.

Ultimately, RWPPs can be considered as among the actors that can influence public policies according to their own political ideologies, will and goals at different stages of policy-making processes (Biard 2019; Skenderovic 2007). A recent publication edited by Biard, Bernhard and Betz (2019) expands this literature by stressing how RWPPs' influence on public policies has been neglected in academic research. The authors' aim is to explore Western European RWPPs as empirical case studies, and they conclude that RWPPs do have a material impact on public policies, especially regarding immigration issues and the tightening of integration measures.

In conclusion, right-wing populist rhetoric can be summarised as anti-elitist, exclusionary, discriminatory and appealing to common sense and national preference by mobilising sentiments like unfairness and injustice. This rhetoric deals with political questions such as "what went wrong; who is to blame; and what is to be done to reverse the situation" (Betz and Johnson 2004: 323). Furthermore, RWPPs' rhetoric instrumentalises ethnic, religious, linguistic and political minorities as scapegoats for the woes in society by categorising them as threats and dangers to "us" (Wodak 2021b). Ultimately, according to Powell (1986), RWPPs' rhetoric focuses on the demand for radical changes within society, especially based on an idealised past to be recovered.

2.3. Right-Wing Populism and Borders: A Magnetic Nexus

Borders are in motion: They are fluid components evolving in different spatial and temporal contexts and are simultaneously being challenged by the new dimensions of globalisation (Konrad 2015). Moreover, Wodak (2021a: 96) stresses that "despite an ever more unified and globalised world, […] more borders and walls emerge, defining nation states and protecting them from dangers both alleged and real". This outlines how borders

are constantly in flux and are increasingly growing in number (Casaglia and Laine 2017). As argued by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013: 6):

> Borders today still perform a world-configuring function, but they are often subject to shifting and unpredictable patterns of mobility and overlapping, appearing and disappearing as well as sometimes crystallizing in the form of threatening walls that break up and reorder political spaces that were once formally unified.

This thesis is rooted in the concept of *borderwork*, that is, "to rethink the issue of who is responsible for making, dismantling and shifting borders, rather than rely upon the assumption that this is exclusively the business of the state" (Rumford 2012: 897). This effort is part of the hermeneutical inquiry of restating the meaning of borders (Vollmer 2017a). Against this backdrop, borders can be tackled as social realities conditioned upon how and by whom they are negotiated and exploited: "borders are not given, but emerge through socio-political and cultural border-making processes (i.e. bordering) that take place within society. Borders are not, for example, mere independent variables in the analysis of political processes, they are co-constitutive of political agency" (Scott 2020a: 4).

Consequently, borders can be "re- and de-constructed through institutional and discursive practices at different levels and by different actors" (Laine and Casaglia 2017: 5). This section aims to provide an original theoretical framework by linking political science, border studies and political geography to explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders. These parties are among the actors who discursively create, shift and transform borders both materially and symbolically. While the former represents the discursive construction of borders as tangible objects of control (e.g. walls, border control), the latter defines the discursive construction of borders through the inclusion and exclusion of specific categories of people helped by the fluidity of constructing "us" and "them".

This section gives insights into how borders can be intended as multi-scalar discursive social constructs or as multidimensional entities "constituted in different symbolic and material forms and functions as well as socio-political and cultural practices" (Brambilla et al. 2017: 2). Furthermore, it explores the intertwined relationship between borders, territory, sovereignty and scales. This intertwined relation is essential to better grasp the contemporary developments and the role of borders in the production of new forms of territorialisation. Finally, the purpose is to build an original framework to empirically and heuristically explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders in CBRs.

2.3.1. Understanding Borders as Discursive Social Constructs: From Old to New Perspectives

According to Vollmer (2021: 2), "the history and invention of territorial borders are intrinsically interwoven with the invention of separating lands, exclusion, hierarchies, supremacies and at a later point in time with the invention of nations and nation states". In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia initiated the era of nation-states and nationalism (Brunet-Jailly 2010). This marked the essentialisation of a homogeneous community favoured by a model of territorial statehood that reifies the nation and promotes national identity politics (Agnew 2008). Laine (2016) asserts that the Westphalian notion of sovereignty and its territorial logic propelled the vision of the nation-state as the main reality for people. From this perspective, borders represent dividing lines, which lead to both material and symbolic distinctions between an inside and an outside. They are tools serving practical purposes regarding three issues: protection (historical protection from the territory against enemies), control (borders' role as doors) and differentiation (between the in- and the out-group) (Hamman 2013). Anderson and O'Dowd (1999: 594) define this conception of borders as external state boundaries as follows: "Borders then refer to legal lines separating different jurisdictions; or to a frontier area of variable width on either side of this legal line; or simply to a broad zone of transition between different societies and centres of power." As such, this normative perspective conceptualises borders as regulating political, social and economic activities.

Since the Second World War, however, borders have undergone significant challenges, such as the increasing geographic mobility of people, globalisation and the political integration of Europe, all of which destabilised the Westphalian territorial logic of the nation-state (Vollmer 2017a: 2). Besides the conception of the border *per se*, this has greatly affected the field of border studies. Indeed, the reconceptualisation of borders in the field has been closely intertwined with major societal transformations articulated around colonialism, wars and nationalism (Paasi 2022), which has resulted in the current trend in border studies to think of borders as dynamic, fragmented and ephemeral devices (Axelsson 2022; Lamont and Molnár 2002). Kolossov (2005: 608-610) exposed how the development of border studies moved from a historical-geographical approach focusing on borders as lines of delimitation and demarcation to geo-political approaches that consider borders as social constructs relating to the construction of ethnic, national and other territorial

identities. In his seminal publication three decades ago, the geographer John Agnew (1994: 71) already emphasised this trend by pointing out the danger of a *territorial trap*, that is, the pitfall of seeing "the territorial state as the container of society when the state is sovereign".

In this contemporary framework, borders are viewed as multi-perspectival objects. As Rumford (2012: 887) points out, "borders cannot be properly understood from a single privileged vantage point and bordering processes can be interpreted differently from different perspectives". This means that borders exist at multiple sites and have different meanings for different people (Balibar 2002). According to Sohn (2016: 183), this perspective accounts for the borders' multiplicity, that is, the "multiplication of border functions, forms and effects at different levels of social and political action and in various spatio-temporal contexts". Consequently, Balibar (2004: 1) hypothesises that the new socio-political understanding and meanings of borders situate them "everywhere": "they are dispersed a little everywhere, wherever the movement of information, people, and things is happening and is controlled". As such, and as introduced by Vaughan-Williams (2009: 1), borders and politics are considered intrinsically intertwined:

> Borders are ubiquitous in political life. Indeed, borders are perhaps even constitutive of political life. Borders are inherent to logics of inside and outside, practices of inclusion and exclusion, and questions about identity and difference. Of course, there are many different types of borders that can be identified: divisions along ethnic, national or racial lines; class-based forms of stratification; regional and geographical differences; religious, cultural, and generational boundaries; and so on. None of these borders is in any sense given but (re)produced through modes of affirmation and contestation and is, above all, lived. In other words borders are not natural, neutral nor static but historically contingent, politically charged, dynamic phenomena that first and foremost involve people and their everyday lives.

Considering these developments, new concepts have arisen to promote a critical understanding of borders. For example, Amilhat-Szary and Giraut (2015: 3) emphasised the idea of *borderities*, which aims to grasp "the multiple rules and experiences of what a border can be" by exploring the proliferation of locations where border functions occur (or the mobile dimension of borders). Moreover, Brambilla (2015: 17) developed the concept of *borderscape* to epistemologically, ontologically and methodically reflect on borders' agenda in the contemporary era of globalisation and transnational flows:

> The need to problematise the border not as a taken-for-granted entity, but as a site of investigation, by exploring alternative border imaginaries 'beyond the line' and

therefore able to reveal the manifold nature of the border that is in a 'constant state of becoming'; the growing sense among critical scholars of border studies that the 'territorial trap' is now even more inadequate for conceptualising the spatial and temporal coordinates of contemporary political and everyday life; the need to develop tools for identifying and interrogating what and where borders are and how they function in different settings, with what consequences, and for whose benefit; the call for a 'shift from the concept of the border to the notion of bordering practice' and the reference to 'the imaginary of performance for an alternative paradigm for (re)thinking border politics'; the urgency to understand that borders are also temporally not fixed; the interrogation of 'the link between bordering practices and violence' in the past and present as well as 'the various forms of contestation and resistance' border practices give rise to.

Significantly, these new perspectives relate to an understanding of borders from a constructivist perspective. According to Scott (2020a: 4), "borders are in a constant process of confirmation, contestation, transformation and re-confirmation". This means that borders are conceived as social constructs articulated by discursive processes that are geographically and historically contingent (Diener and Hagen 2017; Paasi 1999; Popescu 2012; Storey 2020). In this vein, borders are conceptualised as social representations – or as a mirror of social relations – that play a role in their conceptualisation as social symbols, especially through discursive practices: "The functions and importance of boundaries in the life of the state and society are a subject of discussion and compromise, the roles of boundaries being differently interpreted by various social groups. Social representations about boundaries constitute an element of ethnic and political identity" (Kolossov 2005: 625). Consequently, according to Laine (2016: 467), borders must be (re)considered as multifaceted social institutions re- and deconstructed through discourse: "Borders are the product of a social and political negotiation of space: they frame social and political action; help condition how societies and individuals shape their strategies and identities; and are re- and deconstructed through various institutional and discursive practices at different levels and by different actors."

Against this backdrop, borders should not be merely considered as objective lines on a map – or as lines in the sand (see Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009) – but rather as "a discursive landscape composed by a normative dimension and everyday experience" (Casaglia 2020: 30), "social constructions, part of political, discursive and material orders" (Perrier Bruslé 2013: 2) and "tools for framing social and political action and their impact at various spatial levels of socio-cultural, spatial, political and economic configurations and interaction" (Laine and Casaglia 2017: 3). Following Koch (2018: 2), it is necessary to study

and understand the contemporary discourse on borders to capture their reproduction, manifestation and degradation. Considering borders as multi-scalar social constructs competed discursively at various territorial levels and by various social groups and actors (Laine 2016) makes it possible to sidestep *methodological nationalism*, which refers to the "binding of the scientific eye to the body of the nation" (Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002: 325) – that is, mirroring and reproducing a normative and constructed nationalist image of the social world that is taken for granted. As Sohn (2016: 888) points out, "we should endeavour to develop an approach which does not rely on the assumption that important borders are always state borders, representing divisions, and more importantly which does not reinforce the tendency to always see like a state when viewing borders".

Accordingly, this thesis seeks to understand how RWPPs discursively shape and (re)produce borders through their bordering discourses by getting out from a normative state-centred perspective. Furthermore, as suggested by Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2009: 586), the thesis explores how borders are practised:

> Rather than treating the concept of the border as a territorially fixed, static, line (as paradigmatically depicted by Mercator's map), we begin thinking of it in terms of a series of *practices*. This move entails a more political, sociological, and actor-oriented outlook on how divisions between entities *appear*, or are *produced* and *sustained*.

In this context, I conceptualise the discursive construction of borders as an ongoing dynamic process that considers how "borders are constructed and the categories of difference or separation created" (Newman 2006: 148). To better grasp the role of borders in the reproduction of bounded and reified spaces, the following section will probe the intertwined relationship between borders, territory, sovereignty and scales.

2.3.2. The Intertwined Relation between Borders, Territory, Sovereignty and Scales

To construct an intelligible theoretical framework that can help to explore and understand the discursive construction of borders and the (re)production of different territorialities by RWPPs, it is essential to grasp the relationship between borders, territory, sovereignty and scales. As mentioned by Paasi et al. (2022: 1), borders are essential material and ideological

constructs to understand the reproduction of territories across different scales: "In the modern state system, territories and borders give meaning to each other in the sense that borders delimit territorialized sovereign power." Likewise, Popescu (2012) argues that borders and territories are intrinsically intertwined concepts.

But from a political geography vantage point, what does a territory define? According to Mazzoleni (2022: 2), a territory represents – at first glance – a combination of natural and human space where people gather and live and where individuals, groups and institutions perform. For Maier (2016: 1), a territory refers "to a geographic space, set apart from others by law and boundary" controlled through borders. And Cox (2008: 3) defines a territory as a space that "people defend by excluding some activities and by including those which will enhance more precisely what it is in the territory that they want to defend". These definitions of the concept of territory seem to involve "the creation of unified and homogeneous spaces in which the various social practices – culture, knowledge, education, employment – are rationalized and homogenized" (Agnew 1994: 70). From a more tangible perspective, control over such territories is considered to be performed through territorial jurisdiction, non-intervention, the control of territorial borders and the regulation of territorial (and economic) resources (Lefebvre 2009; Raffestin 1986; Stilz 2019). At the same time, however, it is crucial to consider territories as socially performed:

> While it is tempting to relate territoriality to some inbuilt feature of human beings, more nuanced perspectives suggest that much of our territorial behaviour is a consequence of our broader socio-political conditioning and should therefore be analysed within its social and political (rather than biological or genetic) context, where territories are seen to be socially produced and territorial strategies can be viewed as mechanisms to achieve particular ends. (Storey 2020: 2)

More than two decades ago, Anderson and O'Dowd (1999: 594) mentioned that "territorial borders both shape and are shaped by what they contain, and what crosses or is prevented from crossing them. The 'container' and 'contents' are mutually formative. Ultimately the significance of borders derives from the importance of territoriality as an organizing principle of political and social life." Accordingly, and as outlined by Paasi (2022), the reproduction of territories and the persistence of bounded spaces arise through the expression of *social spatialisation* and *spatial socialisation*. While the former defines the materialisation of space through the reproduction of politico-economic and cultural practices driven by power-holding actors (e.g. politicians), the latter characterises the

socialisation of individuals and collectives as members of bounded entities through geohistorical practices and discourses that negotiate identities and ideologies. This understanding of the reproduction and persistence of territories is essential to seize the role of territorial borders in the discursive (re)production of bounded and reified spaces by RWPPs because borders represent a means to express the balance of territorialised powers (Amilhat-Szary 2015; Casaglia 2020).

From this perspective, borders have become the location for the performance of territorial sovereignty *par excellence*. Even if social, cultural and economic practices do not necessarily coincide with the imaginary of state borders on the map, it is essential to underline that "the state remains a key container of sovereignty even as local and global nodes of power grow, which points out to further conflict as these divergent views of territoriality overlap and intersect" (Paasi et al. 2022: 3). According to Vollmer (2021: 3), this is related to the idea that "linear separation and definite state borders became a necessity only with the invention of binding people and nation to an authoritatively defined territory". Sociologist Saskia Sassen (2006: 1) makes a similar point in her influential book *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* when she points out that even though globalisation has led to significant societal changes and transformations, the national scale remains the most powerful:

> The national is still the realm where formalization and institutionalization have all reached their highest level of development, though they rarely reach the most enlightened forms we conceive of. Territory, law, economy, security, authority, and membership all have largely been constructed as national in most of the world.

Despite the centrality of the national scale, Sassen highlights the importance of new global systems emerging out of the nation-state *per se*. In this context, the national and global scales are not mutually exclusive but intertwined in complex nodes of power and governance. Territories are constantly in flux. Thus, borders become territorial frames of regulation (Konrad et al. 2018). Accordingly, the effects of globalisation and transnational flows do not equate to the disappearance of territories but are somewhat interlinked with new forms of territorialisation based on new temporalities and spatialities (Maier 2016; Popescu 2012; Sohn 2016). This results in a constructivist understanding of territories and borders through the multi-territorial dimensionality of space, as different forms of territoriality may co-exist and are not necessarily exclusive from other forms of territorial

systems (Perrier Bruslé 2013). Hence, the idea of territorial sovereignty is not automatically equated with the national scale but instead unfolds simultaneously below and beyond nation-state boundaries (Casaglia et al. 2020).

Accordingly, territories, borders and sovereignty are constantly negotiated and contested "across multiple scales of discourse and action" (Novak 2011: 760). The nation-state *per se* cannot be considered the exclusive level for territorial politics (Mountz 2013); instead, territorial politics has been decentralised across several territorial levels (Swenden and Maddens 2008; Keating 2021). In addition, as Mazzoleni (2017) points out, the weakening of national barriers has generated a rescaling of political mobilisation through different scales: regional, national, interstate, international, European and cross-border. Laine (2016: 478) makes the point as follows:

> The national outline still has a great impact on how society is ordered and bordered. The idea of territorial space continues to be relevant to networked and fluid spaces, just as the national metanarrative has endured in the midst of a multitude of more regionally and locally based narratives and discourses. National belonging is at stake everywhere in today's multiscalar production of borders, yet borders are products of a social and political negotiation of space at the intersection of scales (…) the nation-state itself is a multiscalar construction and its borders are constantly negotiated and reconfigured by actors on different scales. State borders are not only political or administrative, but continue to be deeply constitutive of the ways in which various symbolic, social, and cultural lines of difference are conceived.

In political geography, the concept of scale is commonly used as "a shorthand reference to social, environmental, economic, and political processes having some sort of spatial expression" (Jonas 2015: 26), illustrating how political processes are spatially operating and (re)negotiated. However, there is a tremendous debate in the field regarding the ontological *versus* epistemological nature of scales, especially between the political-economic and poststructuralist approaches (see Herod 2011), although both consider scales as non-fixed and fluid entities.

The political-economic approach, based on Marxist materialism, considers scales as social constructs that become material entities or ontological beings used for power relations and struggles and are (re)shaped or transformed by different social actors (see Giddens 1984; Taylor 1981). The aim of this approach is to better understand the social (re)production of space through broader socio-spatial processes such as the rise of capitalism and globalisation. For instance, Smith (1992) developed the concept of the *politics of scale* to

better understand how the production of scales shapes the geographical construction of material life through contested social processes.

The criticism of the poststructuralist approach against the political-economic one is rooted in the fixed, reified and essentialised nature of scales within the latter. Instead, it focuses on understanding the mental performativity of scales and exploring how social, political or cultural relations shape specific scalar configurations (see Haggett 1972; Hart 1982). The poststructuralist approach regards scales in an epistemological sense, based on Kantian idealism, where they are understood as representational or discursive devices used as a category of practice to explore socio-spatial ordering or as "a spatial imaginary, an analytic for making sense of the world" (Jones et al. 2017: 147). Moore's (2008) significant contribution, for example, advocates for an epistemological understanding of scales as categories of practice, including narratives, classifications or schemas that lead to particular ways of seeing, thinking and acting.

To move beyond the dichotomous categorisation of scales as either material or performative devices, it is helpful to grasp scales through the concept of *scalar politics* revisited by MacKinnon (2010). According to the author, it is necessary to consider scales through both their material and discursive dimensions in a complementary fashion, which helps to bridge the ontological and epistemological divide. As argued by MacKinnon (idem: 30), "this position is underpinned by a critical realist standpoint which recognises the importance of discourses and representations to the social construction of particular objects and relations, while maintaining that such objects remain independent of individual actors' conceptions of them". This understanding is particularly useful for better grasping the material impact of scales in the performativity of discourses. It explores how discourses and particular social representations (re)produce these scales, which become materially relevant and institutionalised through ongoing contentious politics. It is important to note that scales are always being subject to change and transformation (see Cox 2018). Scales are necessarily related to the context in which they are (re)produced and should not be essentialised to a static definition, as Paasi (2004: 542) argues: "scales are also historically contingent; they are produced, exist and may be destroyed or transformed in social and political practices and struggles".

This approach is compelling for exploring how RWPPs' construction of context-dependent tropes is territorially influenced, expressed and contested across various territorial scales (Lizotte 2019). Therefore, the use of the concept of scales in this research

contributes to a better understanding of how populism is spatially performed through a geographically-grounded approach.

This emphasises the significance of understanding the concepts of borders, territory and sovereignty by sidestepping the national container embedded in the concepts of the *territorial trap* and *methodological nationalism*. As Scott (2015: 27) notes, there is a need to move from ethnocultural areas to study borders at diverse socio-spatial and geographical scales. Globalisation has led to (re)configurations in territoriality emerging from new patterns of mobility, communication and regulation through the increased mobility of people, goods, capital and services (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999; Brenner 2004). In this context, supranational integration, such as the European integration process, has provided new opportunities for transnational configurations (Perkmann and Sum 2002), where new geo-political scales have emerged alongside the traditional national one (Häkli 2008; Jessop 2000). This changing perspective has fostered a territorial restructuring of politics by revitalising sub-state political arenas in which political parties play a relevant role as they nurture regional political mobilisations (Detterbeck 2012; Hepburn 2009; Keating 2014; León and Scantamburlo 2022; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017). Thus, political parties operate in multi-level electoral systems and have to deal with multiple – from regional to national and supranational – political arenas (Deschouwer 2003). According to Anderson and O'Dowd (1999: 602), this changing perspective can be traced back to various socio-political and historical developments:

> Clearly, political territoriality is undergoing an historic change because of a series of related developments which include: the partial pooling of state sovereignty in supra-state regions like the EU; the increase of sub-state regionalisms and of autonomist or separatist nationalisms within states; related tendencies towards federalization of the devolution of central state powers; geo-political changes following the demise of the USSR and the end of the Cold War; the growth of various types of transnational nongovernmental organizations and agencies; and the fact that the national state increasingly has to share the political stage with other institutions in systems of multi-level governance.

Thus, cross-border regions (CBRs) are crucial territorial spaces to explore the overlapping of different territorial scales through the everyday discursive construction of borders. They demonstrate an increasing socio-economic interdependence in which new structures of opportunities for political action appear (Perkmann and Sum 2002), and they are more and more embedded in transnational territorial logics where economic and symbolic resources

are shared across territorial borders (Perkmann 2007; Sohn 2016; Varol and Soylemez 2018). In these regions, people deal daily with the cross-border mobility of people, goods, capital and services resulting from an increasing transnational integration (Jensen and Richardson 2004; Lamour 2014). Conceptualised as zones of interaction (Rumford 2012: 895) and places of ambiguity infused with "flows, gateways, hubs, corridors, and networks" (Konrad et al. 2018: 4), CBRs highlight the understanding of borders as post-national entities, as the daily outstripping of the jurisdictional and conceptual limits of state-centred orientations reinforces the creation of new political functions of integration and interaction beyond state borders (Popescu 2012; Scott 2015).

Furthermore, according to the geographical proximity that such regions have with the border *per se*, CBRs entail a specific symbolisation of borders, thus creating new political opportunities – primarily through cross-border cooperation and political and symbolic belonging (Johnson et al. 2011; Laine 2016; Meier 2020). Sohn and Scott (2020: 21) underline that "the sense of the border is not the same for a whole nation or for a small group that is affected by it closely in its daily practices". In the same vein, Konrad et al. (2018: 9) argue that the meaning of borders is different for people living in the immediate context of a borderland: "borders mean different things to different people and those who can cross or inhabit the border gain a variety of insights about how the borders works and the impact that the border has on the lives of borderland residents, occasional border crossers, and those who do not cross." As such, the geographical proximity that people living in borderlands have with the border *per se* increases the multiplicity of lived experiences relating to the transnational dynamics characterising such regions (Laine 2021).

In conclusion, the changing perspectives produced *inter alia* by globalisation and increasing transnationalism allow RWPPs evolving in CBRs to discursively shape borders by mobilising multiple territorial scales to deal with various territorialities and border meanings. Accordingly, this thesis aims to capture the various forms that borders' construction can take by moving "beyond the positivist approach that conceives borders as static, naturalised realities and as lines separating two sovereign states" (Perrier Bruslé 2013: 2).

2.3.3. Linking Right-Wing Populism and Borders: A Constructivist and Interdisciplinary Framework

This section has two main goals: to theoretically reflect on the intertwined relationship between right-wing populism and borders and to suggest a constructivist and interdisciplinary framework that will help to empirically and heuristically explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders in CBRs. As argued by Osuna (2022: 17), borders are intrinsically constituted and constitutive of populist discourses:

> Borders play a prominent role in constructing antagonistic relationships against corrupt or ill-intentioned others which can be either international elites, immigrants, or deviant in-groups who support out-groups in eroding political, economic or cultural boundaries. In their attempt to re-enact their ideal heartland and recover a purportedly lost popular sovereignty, these parties [RWPPs] suggest to (re)establish political borders between states as well as to reinforce internal legal, economic or cultural frontiers. They propose securitization and policing to reduce migration flows. They recommend laws to discriminate or exclude foreigners from becoming citizens, residents or from using public services based on negative moral considerations and on the assumption that some migrants are suspected of damaging the traditional ways of life and upsetting social balances. Moreover, these parties want to reduce or stop altogether the participation in cross-border initiatives, treaties, and supranational organizations that they interpret as hindering national sovereignty.

As discussed elsewhere, I conceptualise borders as social constructs shaped and (re)negotiated through discursive practices. Furthermore, it has been argued that political parties are actors who use discourse to (re)produce socio-political meanings and symbolic interpretations of borders through constructed imaginaries (Brambilla 2015; Wodak 2021b). In this regard, Scott (2020a: 9-10) suggests the concept of *bordering*, which illustrates:

> The everyday construction of borders, for example through political discourses and institutions, media representations, school textbooks, stereotypes and everyday forms of transnationalism. Bordering, as a socio-spatial practice, plays an important role in shaping human territoriality and political map – every social and regional groups has an image of its own territory and boundaries.

The everyday construction of borders has also been underlined by Andersen, Klatt, and Sandberg (2016), as they point out that borders are created through the meaning that is attached to them and that various actors contribute to creating, shifting and transforming

borders in everyday life. Accordingly, this process leads to different perceptions, beliefs and claims about borders. The concept of *bordering* relates to two different narratives used in the political discourses of RWPPs: re-bordering and de-bordering narratives (see Lamour and Varga 2020; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017). While the former stress the re-emergence of borders as barriers (Häkli 2008; Popescu 2012), for example through narratives articulated around the reinforcement of border controls and/or the symbolisation of the border as a tool of protection, the latter emphasise the loss of the structuring capacity of state borders (Paasi 2002; Popescu 2012), for example through narratives articulated around the benefits of border permeability because of cross-border exchanges.

As shown, RWPPs depict the world in a Manichean fashion by essentialising an idealised "us" – dependent on historical, national and socio-political factors – and pitting it against dangerous "others" who encompass a variety of different categories, from migrants to political elites to supranational entities (Manucci and Weber 2017; Pelinka 2013; Taggart 2000). This performance of difference articulated around the reproduction of a territorial imagination (Jones 2021) and resulting from the essentialisation of "us" and "them" can be intertwined with a spatialised and territorialised notion of sovereignty. As a result, borders become loci for RWPPs to practically and symbolically retake control, that is, to put sovereigntist claims at the forefront of their ideological and political discourses by reconceptualising sovereign power along territorial lines and clawing back control on behalf of popular communities (Basile and Mazzoleni 2020; Kallis 2018). Thus, by producing discourses articulated around sovereigntist claims, RWPPs normatively legitimise borders as tools of demarcation and defence (Rheindorf and Wodak 2018). This specific articulation of borders by RWPPs perpetuates the imaginary of difference, leading to different forms of exclusion and separation (Konrad et al. 2018) and ideologically "reproduc[ing] the limits of an imagined community of 'us' and 'them', friends and enemies" (Paasi 2013: 485).

Accordingly, borders represent an essential resource for RWPPs to deal with issues like securitisation and the alleged dangers of immigration that are rooted in a fear of strangers and the loss of identity (Schain 2019). In this vein, RWPPs discursively construct narratives based on the dangerousness of others, and as Andersen (2020: 4) asserts, "the narrative then follows a proscribed pattern. Actions against the invaders must be taken to protect us from them. At this point, any means of stopping the 'feetpeople,' or 'migrant hordes' from 'invading,' 'swarming,' and 'flooding' into our country can be applied." As argued by Paasi et al. (2022) and Scott (2017), this conception is part of a clichéd narrative aimed at keeping

one's territory safe from outside threats by fetishising physical borders to protect territorial sovereignty. Consequently, borders can be considered malleable political devices used by RWPPs to pursue specific goals, such as highlighting, contextualising and legitimising various issues and themes at a discursive level. As stated by Scott (2020a: 6), "borders are at the heart of territorial sovereignty and anything associated with a state border or the crossing thereof is subject to potential politicization". Thus, the sacralisation of borders as a real-and-imagined space of containment of the territorial body is part of the recurring RWPP's political agendas (Casaglia et al. 2020). As pointed out by Vollmer (2017a: 11), "the production and construction of border meanings take place everywhere and all the time: a continuum of border meanings. Discourses and practices are means of this constant production and construction. Through these people identify with a territory and its history, myths, and symbols and icons." Furthermore, and as suggested by Bialasiewicz (2011: 3-4), the construction of imagined geographies across borders as the only reality occurs through the mobilisation of myths and narratives that decree how the world works and must be.

To date, few studies have developed a relational approach between right-wing populism and borders. Among them, Lamour and Varga (2020) show how borders represent a resource in right-wing populist discourse by underlining the dual rhetoric on state borders used by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, which oscillates between closing and opening borders, depending on the specific categories of mobile cultural groups being targeted. Similarly, Mazzoleni and Mueller (2017) sketch how RWPPs can alternate between de-bordering and re-bordering narratives in the cross-border region between Switzerland and Italy. Lamour (2022) points out how the right-wing populist construction of antagonism between the people and the elite can be framed regionally beyond state borders in cross-national regions. Casaglia and Coletti (2021) show how borders are crucial tools in the rhetoric of nationalist RWPPs as they feed sovereigntist demands by spatialising the nation-state as a referential frame and constructing territorialised threats articulated around the reinforcement of national territorial and political identities. Finally, Ochoa Espejo (2019) argues that populists use the border to exclude people and challenge the liberal democrats' universal inclusion of liberalism with a focus on the USA. This promising literature, however, lacks a *prima facie* solid theoretical and interdisciplinary understanding of the intertwined relationship between right-wing populism and borders that would combine political science, border studies and political geography.

Some of the most up-to-date and perhaps the most accomplished reflections on the theoretical and empirical interlinkages between right-wing populism and borders have been by Osuna (2022) and Demata (2022). On the one hand, the work of Osuna shows how material and symbolic borders consist of and constitute populist discourses by empirically analysing discourses produced by European RWPPs. He shows, for instance, how different populist dimensions (e.g. the antagonistic depiction of the other, the moralisation of the distinction between "us" and "them", the idealisation of a past identity to justify the reinforcement of protective boundaries, the use of the concept of popular sovereignty and a majoritarian logic as a means to legitimise borders and the reliance on a strong personalistic leader) are used "to justify, strengthen or instrumentalize borders in (re)bordering narratives and claims" (Ibid.: 2). On the other hand, by considering mainstream US political rhetoric, Demata reveals how borders are used as discursive mechanisms of power to shape national identities. From a linguistic perspective, he demonstrates that right-wing populism and borders are intrinsically linked when considering borders as an instrument for the discursive construction of the nation through a politics of insecurity and fear. However, I argue that neither of these contributions sufficiently reflects on how borders can be mobilised as multi-scalar and multi-perspectival entities evolving across various territorial scales (regional, national, interstate, international, European and cross-border ones) that are performed through the discourse of RWPPs and how these different territorialities overlap in the right-wing populist material and symbolic discursive construction of borders. This thesis attempts to fill the gap by providing a conceptual framework that combines political science, border studies and political geography from a linguistic perspective to empirically explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders in a constructivist and interdisciplinary fashion. Following Paasi et al. (2022: 5), the goal is to theoretically and empirically explore "how intertwined, place-specific socio-economic circumstances and imaginaries give rise to geographically differentiated territory-border dynamics" within RWPPs' discourses at various and multiple territorial scales.

The construction of borders by right-wing populist discourses involves the use of rhetorical strategies by political actors to frame an issue as political or to call something political (Hoeglinger 2016; Palonen 2003; Wood 2016). Thus, discourse plays a crucial role in shaping territorial borders by attaching meaning to various issues and linking them to politics through symbolic representations that are constructed and embedded in specific political, social and cultural contexts (Forchtner and Wodak 2018). Discourse is part of the

production, reproduction, transformation and destruction of social identities through language (Wodak 2021a). Therefore, RWPPs' discursive construction of borders becomes a process that leads to generating borders as ontological beings, which "impacts upon new laws, policies and practices creating new border realities and practices" (Vollmer 2017a: 8).

By exploring the persistence of bounded territorial spaces in social practices, Paasi (2013) developed two crucial concepts: Borders can be intended as *technical landscapes of social control* or as *discursive landscapes of social power*. While the former defines the understanding of borders as tools to justify and control the inside and the outside of bounded territories through sovereignty, citizenship, security, control and regulation, the latter apprehends borders through identity narratives that reverberate with collective memories and the reproduction of imaginings, ideologies, emotions and passions. These concepts help to improve our understanding of how borders mesh cultural symbolic practices with material practices to strengthen the linkages between a bounded community and a given territory. Wastl-Walter (2011: 2) also underscores this dichotomy between material and non-material borders:

> Borders are still ubiquitous, are manifested in diverse ways, and have various functions and roles. They can be material and non-material and may appear in the form of a barbed-wire fence, a brick wall, a door, a heavily-armed border guard or as symbolic boundaries, that is, conceptual distinctions created by actors to categorize components of belonging and exclusion.

Similarly, I argue that two specific types of border construction could arise in RWPPs' discourses: 1) the material and normative construction of borders as tangible objects (or physical devices) and 2) the symbolic construction of borders as tools of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, the material and normative construction of borders as tangible objects emerges when RWPPs discursively shape borders to symbolise a wall or a tool of protection (e.g. in the case of border control and patrolling) by reifying them as physical security devices. On the other hand, the symbolic construction of borders as a tool of inclusion and exclusion arises when RWPPs discursively shape borders through the process of *moralisation of bordering*, that is, by excluding groups of people relating to a narrative of deservingness or "following the principle that some people do not deserve to be treated equally or in the way we (the host society) treat human beings" (Vollmer 2017a: 4). According to Andersen (2020: 3), this discourse is articulated around a logic of security:

> The logic of security stems from a set of fundamental assumptions that the world and its people are dangerous and unequal, a world where humanity is divided between us and them, and where the foreigner cannot be embraced as a member of our own community. As such, migrants are inherently undeserving of our generosity because they are not and can never be like us. Dehumanized as enemies to be feared, there is no discursive space for the migrant story to be told. They are unidimensional, foreign, alien, and othered.

In this configuration, the border is intended as a socio-psychological tool of protection against real or imagined threats. The significant work carried out by Van Houtum and Van Naerssen (2002: 134) underlines this specific articulation of borders as socio-psychological tools through the concept of *othering* (i.e. as a social practice of differentiation):

> Making others through the territorial fixing of order, is intrinsically connected to our present image of borders. Others are both necessary, constitutive for the formation of borders, as well as the implication of the process of forming these borders. Others are needed and therefore constantly produced and reproduced to maintain the cohesion in the formatted order of a territorially demarcated society.

As argued earlier, borders are considered multi-perspectival objects that exist at multiple sites and have different meanings for different people. Populism can also be understood in a multi-perspectival fashion, and RWPPs operate in different territorial spaces that depend on exogenous conditions (or specific socio-political factors), which leads to different political opportunities and constraints (Heinisch, Holtz-Bacha, and Mazzoleni 2021; Scott 2020b; Wirth et al. 2016). Accordingly, and as populism can be defined as a chameleon-like phenomenon (Taggart 2000), RWPPs can strategically shift the meaning of the people and the elites at different and multiple scales. Thus, they produce a *multi-level populism* in response to the proliferation of political action loci (Mazzoleni 2005; 2017). For example, RWPPs operating at the sub-state level can shift the meaning of the people at the level of the regionally bounded community and, thus, frame a regional heartland to be protected. In this case, the dichotomy between the people and the elites can be equated with the region as a territorial entity (Heinisch, Massetti, and Mazzoleni 2020).

RWPPs play a role in the discursive construction of borders by reproducing territorial logics through the categorisation of in- and out-group membership – specifically, when they frame "us" and "them" through their exclusionary rhetoric (Casaglia et al. 2020; Basile and Mazzoleni 2020; Wodak 2021b). I assert that the construction of borders takes place at

different territorial levels depending on political opportunities and constraints, as I argue that different actors are constantly (re)defining borders at different scales through social and political negotiations of space (see Laine 2016). In this vein, Cox (1998) suggests the concept of *jumping scales*, which aims to understand how (political) actors embedded in a specific territorial field (space of dependence) deal with other territorial scales (spaces of engagement) according to their daily social and political achievements to secure and compete for their social and political interests (see also Herod 2011). This approach is compelling and crucial to consider "how borders contribute to a nested system of territoriality produced by various actors on different scales" (Perrier Bruslé 2013: 4).

Furthermore, according to Heinisch, Massetti, and Mazzoleni (2020), political actors adapt to multi-level opportunities and constraints, which generates ambivalence, flexibility and adaptability. This leads to the mobilisation of different territorial scales, especially in multi-layered arenas. As suggested by Wodak (2021b), this adaptability is part of the *strategy of calculated ambivalence* that RWPPs use to address multiple and hybrid audiences. As further noted by Laine (2021), this matter has been enhanced by the current era's increased unboundedness and fluidity, which have not only blurred the division between "us" and "them" but also complicated its symbolic construction. Biancalana and Mazzoleni (2020) show how RWPPs use the *strategy of calculated ambivalence* to construct the people in right-wing populist discourse by avoiding a clear and static definition so as to cancel differences, address the widest possible constituency and deal with competitors and allies within different political arenas. In the same vein, Brubaker (2020: 61) outlines how ambiguity consists of the populist discourse when framing the people through a mix of "redistributive, democratic, protectionist, illiberal and authoritarian themes".

As stated earlier, I focus on CBRs in order to study RWPPs' discursive construction of borders. CBRs entail a physical proximity with the border, which leads to a greater politicisation of issues relating to multi-layered identities that are part of an everyday process of social and cultural de- and re-bordering mechanisms (Koch 2018; Scott 2020b). CBRs represent peculiar multi-scalar spaces of mobilisation where political parties must adapt and respond to several loci of decision making at different territorial levels (Mazzoleni 2017; Perrier Bruslé 2013; Sassen 2006). Consequently, RWPPs evolving in CBRs must deal with multiple territorial scales to address the multiple identities and belongings of specific territorially bounded communities. As compellingly highlighted by Laine (2016: 472), "borderland dwellers are able to jump scales and construct the scale of the border for

themselves. The national border is not necessarily experienced only as an immediate limit, but may be perceived as a local phenomenon, the edge of a nation-state, a transnational staging post." CBRs are compelling in the sense that they represent fertile ground for RWPPs to increase tension by politicising political, social, cultural and economic differentials and grievances relating to their multi-scalar and transnational territorial nature (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Gumy, Drevon, and Kaufmann 2022).

By using a constructivist and interdisciplinary framework to consider the theoretical aspects developed in this chapter and address the intertwined relationship between right-wing populism and borders, I develop a threefold conceptual perspective to empirically and heuristically explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders in European CBRs. These three perspectives serve as toolboxes for RWPPs to discursively (re)produce and shape borders and defend their political and ideological interests:

I. Firstly, the discursive construction of borders can be grasped through the concept of border issues. An issue can be defined as a point, a matter or a problem requiring public attention and discussion, which then leads to a political decision (Sheppard-Sellam 2019). Neveu (2015) defines "public problems" as social facts that are turned into objects of concern, debate and even public action. This transformation occurs by constructing an issue or a problem as something worthy of public attention. Constructing a public problem usually happens with the help of "entrepreneurs" who have an interest in and push to bring the problem to the public's attention. Hence, border issues can be defined as public problems that relate to the border, need to be addressed by officeholders and for which citizens demand solutions. As such, RWPPs are among the many "entrepreneurs" embedded in the discursive construction of border issues. Two main categories of border issues can arise: those that deal directly and those that deal indirectly with the border. In this vein, border issues are conceptualised not only as issues that deal directly with the border intended as a physical device to divide or connect, as in the case of border control and patrolling, but also as an indirect symbolic and identity device intended to discursively shape inclusion and exclusion practices by constructing an "us" and a "them".

II. Secondly, the discursive construction of borders can be grasped through the concept of bordering narratives. Bordering narratives are intended as a set of discourses used

to construct socio-political issues as an aspect of everyday life (see De Fina 2017) by thematically and structurally exploring the "what" and the formation of discourses (Forchtner 2021). Borders can be framed as discursive resources to promote – depending on contextual opportunities and constraints – either the opening or the closing of state borders. In the former case, the border corresponds to a space of exchange and integration (de-bordering narrative), while in the latter, it is seen as a barrier to prevent immigration and cross-border movements (re-bordering narrative). Bordering narratives are generated by the argumentation strategies that RWPPs use to discursively legitimise borders and anti-immigration stances or to justify the political inclusion and exclusion of certain categories of people by symbolically and materially legitimising the border as a wall or a gate. Accordingly, bordering narratives are used by RWPPs to contextually and discursively construct borders in a way that defends their political interests. They do this by shaping socio-political issues related to borders and migration based on their understanding and articulation of various social problems.

III. Finally, the discursive construction of borders can be grasped through the concept of symbolic multi-scalar border framing. Against the backdrop of globalisation, I argued that the weakening of national barriers has generated a rescaling of political mobilisation through different territorial scales: regional, national, interstate, international, European or cross-border (Mazzoleni 2017; Sassen 2006). Thus, political parties operate in multi-layered democratic settings in which regional and local territories must be considered (Detterbeck 2012; Heinisch, Massetti, and Mazzoleni 2020; Hough and Jeffery 2006). Besides, as political parties are evolving in multi-level electoral systems, they must compete in regional elections, and their ideological supply must be adapted to the regional context to reach their constituency (Fabre 2008; Müller 2013; Hepburn 2014). This leads to a form of multi-level populism through which RWPPs can perform a symbolic multi-scalar border framing by constructing specific understandings of borders and reproducing various and distinctive territorial logics via in- and out-group membership categorisation. As such, the framing of borders through multiple scales is useful for RWPPs to address the multiple identities and belongings of specific and targeted territorially bounded communities.

2.4. Conclusion: A Plea for a Constructivist and Interdisciplinary Framework

This research is anchored in a constructivist perspective. Populism is approached by using a historical and geographical context-dependent discursive framework. As such, it is not considered a pre-existing political project but a discursively constructed category shaped by and shaping social reality (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). At the same time, borders are considered to emerge from contested socio-political border-making processes, that is, as social representations discursively de- and reconstructed by different actors at various territorial levels (Casaglia 2020; Kolossov 2005; Laine 2016; Scott 2020b). Thus, RWPPs act as political actors who can discursively create, shift and transform borders both materially (as tangible objects of control) and symbolically (through a Manichean construction of "us" and "them"). For instance, RWPPs can discursively reproduce a spatialised understanding of sovereignty by framing and essentialising "us" and "them" through an imaginary of difference or, in turn, discursively legitimise physical borders as security walls and, thus, discursively shape borders as fetishized objects to take back control in a multi-scalar fashion (Jones 2021; Konrad et al. 2018; Paasi et al. 2022).

In turn, there is a plea for interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity is of the utmost importance to seize and understand the role of RWPPs in the discursive construction of borders. This theoretical framework aims to connect political science, border studies and political geography through a linguistic perspective. Its goal is to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the discursive (re)production of contemporary borders. As such, the main goal of this research is to expand the field of political science, which is still normatively embedded in methodological nationalism and territorial trap rationales – that is, to take the national scale for granted – by exploring how borders are constructed at different territorial scales in an era characterised by globalisation and the multi-dimensionality of social, political, economic and cultural spaces. Consequently, this research seeks to understand how RWPPs discursively shape and (re)produce borders by grasping the multi-scalar territorial dimension of borders in their discursive practices and sidestepping a normative state-centred perspective. When reproducing a spatialised understanding of sovereignty, RWPPs can strategically shift the meaning of the people and the elites at different and multiple scales to produce a multi-level populism in response to the proliferation of political action loci (Mazzoleni 2005; 2017).

In this regard, my contribution to the field of political science is threefold. Firstly, it sets up a dialogue between political science, border studies, political geography and linguistics to theoretically, empirically and heuristically reflect on the intertwined relationship between right-wing populism and borders, as borders are considered based on and feeding populist discourses (see Osuna 2022). Secondly, it returns the multi-scalar territorial configurations of party politics to the foreground by sidestepping a fundamentally normative and nationalist perspective still persisting in political science and, thus, understanding the relationship between right-wing populism and territorial borders more subtly and accurately. Lastly, it fills theoretical and empirical gaps in academic research by diligently considering RWPPs' discursive construction of borders from a cross-border perspective, as CBRs are characterised as crucial transnational areas involving the interplay of multiple political, social, cultural and economic scalar dynamics.

The interdisciplinary combination of concepts from various academic fields aims to provide an original and interdisciplinary theoretical framework for analysing the construction and (re)production of right-wing populist bordering discourses. Firstly, the critical border studies literature provides a helpful conception of borders as multi-scalar social representations shaped by discursive processes. This helps to better understand how RWPPs use borders as malleable political devices to symbolically and materially legitimise them as tools of protection. Secondly, the concepts of territory, (territorial) sovereignty and scales stemming from political geography literature are effective in understanding how RWPPs can influence, express and contest territorial borders through various territorial scales. This includes how the discursive (re)territorialisation of borders emerges in the right-wing populist discourse. Finally, as stated in the introduction of this chapter, the linguistic perspective is a useful common thread for understanding how discourse plays a central role in three aspects: 1) the enactment of populism as a graded process, 2) the everyday socio-political construction of borders, and 3) the (re)production of a spatialised understanding of territories and territorial sovereignties across various territorial scales.

The next chapter focuses on the linguistic methodological approach used to explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders in CBRs. Indeed, the methodological approach of the discourse historical approach (DHA), which is embedded in the critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework, also considers discourse through a constructivist perspective by asserting a dialectical relationship between discourses and social reality. Thus, DHA also relates to the plea for interdisciplinarity, as this approach aims to transcend the purely

linguistic dimension of discourse by considering the historical, political, social, cultural and psychological backgrounds in which discursive events are embedded.
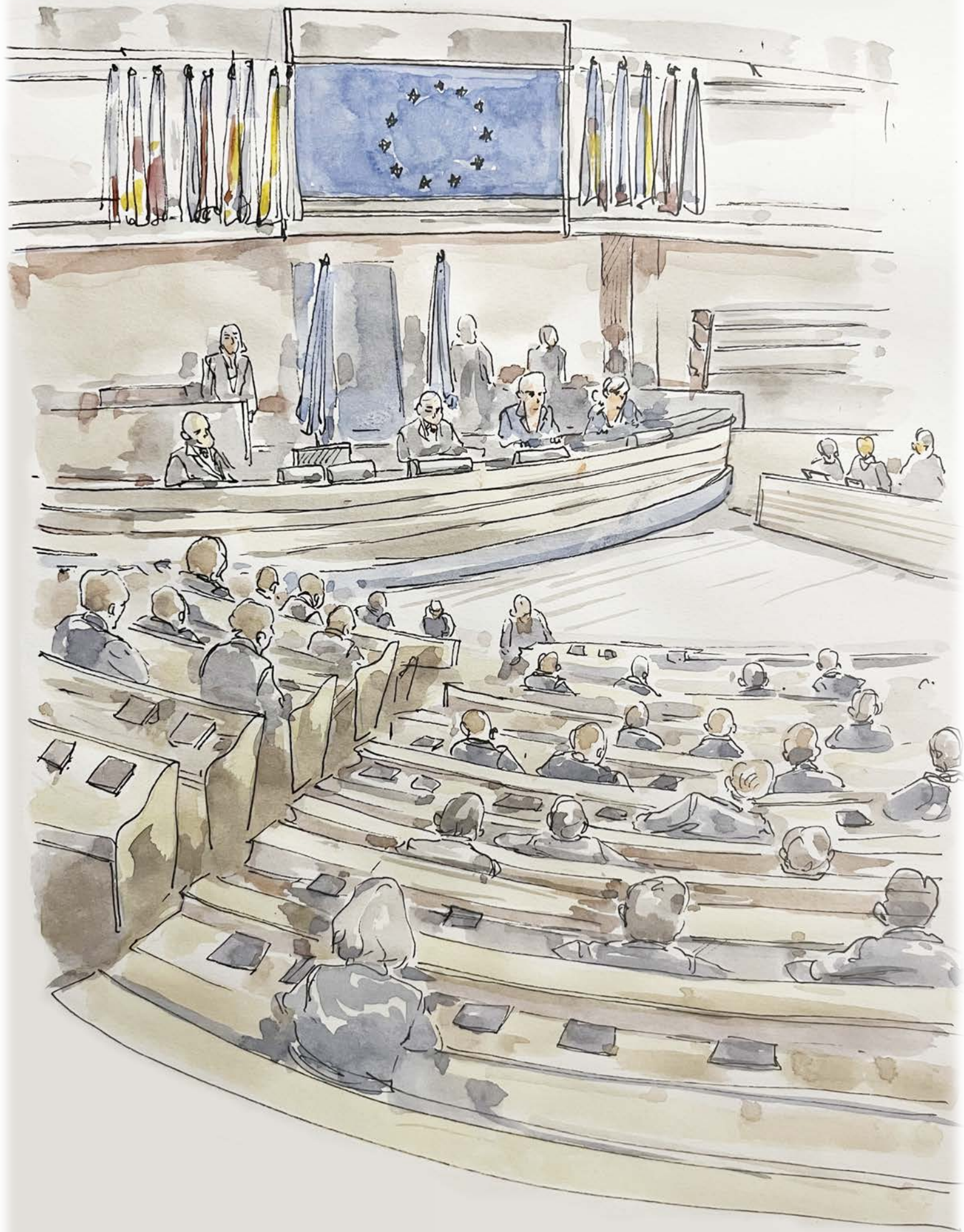
3. On Methodological Aspects: Using the Discourse Historical Approach to Investigate the Elective Affinity between Right-Wing Populism and Borders

This chapter delves into the methodological approach that is used to explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders from a cross-border perspective. I will use the qualitative discourse historical approach (DHA), which is anchored in the critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework. On the one hand, the CDA insists on a dialectical relationship between discourses and social reality, as discourse is considered a social practice that creates, reproduces or changes social structures:

> Discursive practices are socially constitutive in a number of ways. First, they play a decisive role in the genesis and production of certain social conditions. This means that discourses may serve to construct collective subjects like races, nations and ethnicities. Second, they might perpetuate, reproduce or justify a certain social status quo (and racialised, nationalised, ethnicised identities that are related to it). Third, they are instrumental in transforming the status quo (and racialising concepts, nationalities and ethnicities related to it). Fourth, discursive practices may have an effect on the dismantling or even destruction of the status quo (and of racist, nationalist and ethnicist concepts related to it). According to these general aims one can distinguish between constructive, perpetuating, transformational and destructive social macro-functions of discourse. (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 40)

On the other hand, the DHA combines historical, socio-political and linguistic perspectives to focus more explicitly on the historical and political dimensions of discourses. Discourse adapts to and is adapted from social and historical changes, and it is considered a semiotic practice (or a durable product of linguistic actions) as it shapes physical, social and mental aspects of the world for various and multiple social actors (Fairclough 2013: 11). This approach provides the empirical discourse-analytical tools to explore the linguistic and rhetorical means of texts and discourses to take a problem-oriented and interdisciplinary perspective. It does this by focusing extensively on the

historical, political, social, economic and cultural contexts in which discursive events are embedded.

As argued by Reisigl (2017: 55), social, political, economic and ecological changes are constantly taking place at local, regional, national, supranational and global levels. In this context, change is considered a basic historical category, and discourses help to study these changes over time and in different contexts. As such, the DHA represents a compelling interdisciplinary approach to study how these changes occur within political discourses as it enables transcending the purely linguistic dimension of the discourse and conducting a social critique relating to discursive actions in specific contextual historical and political dimensions. Against this background, the study of RWPPs' discourses is of the utmost importance, as they are performed by political actors and leaders who influence and are influenced by the social structures and institutions in which they operate and compete.

Thus, the DHA helps to gain a better understanding of how RWPPs shape and (re)produce territorial borders throughout their discursive practices. As argued in the theoretical framework, borders are considered discursive social and political institutions that are re- and deconstructed through discourse (Laine 2016), and political parties use discourse to (re)produce socio-political meanings and symbolic interpretations of borders through constructed imaginaries (Brambilla 2015; Wodak 2021b). The DHA has rarely been used to explore the discursive construction of borders (exceptions include Biancalana and Mazzoleni 2020; Demata 2022; Lamour 2020; Lamour and Varga 2020; Rheindorf and Wodak 2018). At the same time, this approach has proved to be effective and extensively used to analyse racial discrimination, the legitimisation of immigration controls, external threats, fascism, xenophobia and antisemitism, as well as the construction of identities within various discursive practices (see Krzyżanowski 2010; Reisigl and Wodak 2001a; Rheindorf and Wodak 2020; Richardson 2017; van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; Wodak 2021b).

This chapter is organised as follows. The first section aims to describe the aims of the CDA and the DHA and to present the discourse-analytical tools that the DHA offers to explore the linguistic means relating to the strategies of self- and other-representation, topics, fields of action, genres and contextual dimensions. In turn, the second section aims to develop how these discourse-analytical tools will be applied to run the empirical analyses of this research and display the qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA) to do so.

Finally, the third section aims to draw some conclusions regarding the benefits of using the DHA to explore RWPPs' construction of borders in cross-border regions (CBRs).

3.1. What is Critical Discourse Analysis about?

The empirical part of this thesis is anchored in the CDA approach. In this approach, discourse is considered a social practice that regulates social structures (Fairclough and Wodak 1997)[10] as scholars highlight the dialectical relationship between discourses and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded. Situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect the discourse, which in turn influences the social and political reality: "discourses as linguistic social practices can be seen as constituting non-discursive and discursive social practices and, at the same time, as being constituted by them" (Wodak 2001a: 66). In this regard, discourse is viewed as a socially constituted and constitutive semiotic practice that can create, reproduce or change social reality (Berger and Luckmann 1991). Thus, as Reisigl (2017) asserts, discourse helps to constitute social reality and is constituted by it, as discourse represents, creates, reproduces and changes social reality in specific social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Flowerdew and Richardson (2017: 2) elaborate on this dialectical relationship as follows:

> We study society through discourse, and contextualise (and understand) discourse through an analysis of its historical, socio-political and cultural foundations. Discourse and language are seen in a dialectical relationship, with social structures affecting discourse and discourse affecting social structure. In the former process, while individuals may exercise discursive agency, this is done within the constraints imposed by social conventions, ideologies and power relations. In the latter process, rather than merely representing social reality, discourse(s) actually (re)create social worlds and relations.

The CDA aims to unmask the structures of power by linking linguistic-discursive practices to extra-linguistic social structures: in other words, by considering the relations of struggles and conflict within social and political fields in an interdisciplinary way, that is by

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[10] According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), the main tenets of the CDA are as follows: Power relations are discursive, discourse constitutes society and culture, discourse does ideological work, discourse is historical, and discourse is a form of social action.

considering how the language constitute and transmit knowledge in organising social institutions and exercising power (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). Language is not considered powerful on its own but because of how people use it (Weiss and Wodak 2003). Powerful social groups and institutions who have more or less exclusive access to and control over public discourses are considered to have extensive influence in shaping and constructing social identities and ideologies (Van Dijk 2015). As such, the underlying idea of the CDA is to analyse how social issues are constructed in discourses and linguistic arguments by the people in power (van Leeuwen 2009). Furthermore, according to Fairclough (2013), the power ideal of discourses and language resides in how discourses can be operationalised under certain conditions by shaping new interactions or identities or even materialising new physical objects.

Accordingly, the CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on social problems and political issues by explaining the relationship between social structures and discourses (Van Dijk 2015). Wodak (2001b: 2) notes that the aim of the CDA is to analyse:

> Opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse).

In this vein, context is a crucial aspect of discourse construction. Discourse is considered to be embedded in specific and immediate contexts of production, distribution and reception, which, in turn, are embedded in broader specific institutional and social structures (Fairclough 2001). As such, discursive social and symbolic practices, which are considered to be embedded in micro-contexts, are simultaneously anchored in macro-contexts (or frames of reference), such as social systems (Weiss and Wodak 2003). Taking into consideration the context in which discourses are performed is very important in order to contribute to critical social analysis. The critical social analysis aims to study the relations between the discourse and other social elements such as power relations, ideologies, institutions and social identities. It does not simply describe existing realities but evaluates and explains them by showing the effects of contexts and broader social structures on the production of discourses (and *vice-versa*) (Fairclough 2013).

The CDA's aim is not passive but relates to normative and explanatory assumptions, as one of its scopes is to challenge and explain social inequalities. As Van Dijk (2015: 466) explains:

> Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such *dissident research*, critical discourse analysts take an explicit position and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequality. This is also why CDA may be characterized as a social movement of politically committed discourse analysts.

The CDA is considered an approach rather than a methodology *per se* and has never sought to provide a single or specific theory or methodology (Weiss and Wodak 2003). Stemming from a social-constructivist perspective, it aims to analyse political discourse and explore how social and political problems are discursively constructed through a problem-oriented approach (Forchtner and Wodak 2018; Wodak and Meyer 2016). Thus, the idea behind the CDA is to mediate between the texts and the context in order to avoid a simple deterministic relationship. Meyer (2001: 15) states that:

> One important characteristic arises from the assumption of CDA that all discourses are historical and can therefore only be understood with reference to their context. In accordance with this CDA refers to such extralinguistic factors as culture, society and ideology. In any case, the notion of context is crucial for CDA, since this explicitly includes social-psychological, political, and ideological components and thereby postulates an interdisciplinary procedure.

In summary, and as explained by Flowerdew et Richardson (2017), the CDA is considered an interdisciplinary and problem-driven approach that seeks a better understanding of how discourses figure in social processes, structures and changes by critically exploring and debunking ideologies, powers and inequalities within linguistic traits. Accordingly, discourses are considered to be underpinned by ideologies and values defined by and defining the social world and social interactions in which they are embedded. In this vein, texts and discourses play a key role as they are considered to legitimise inequalities, injustice and oppression in society (van Leeuwen 2009). Figure 3.1 depicts the CDA's dialectical tenets between social structures and discourses.

Figure 3.1 – The dialectical relationship between social reality and discourses within the CDA
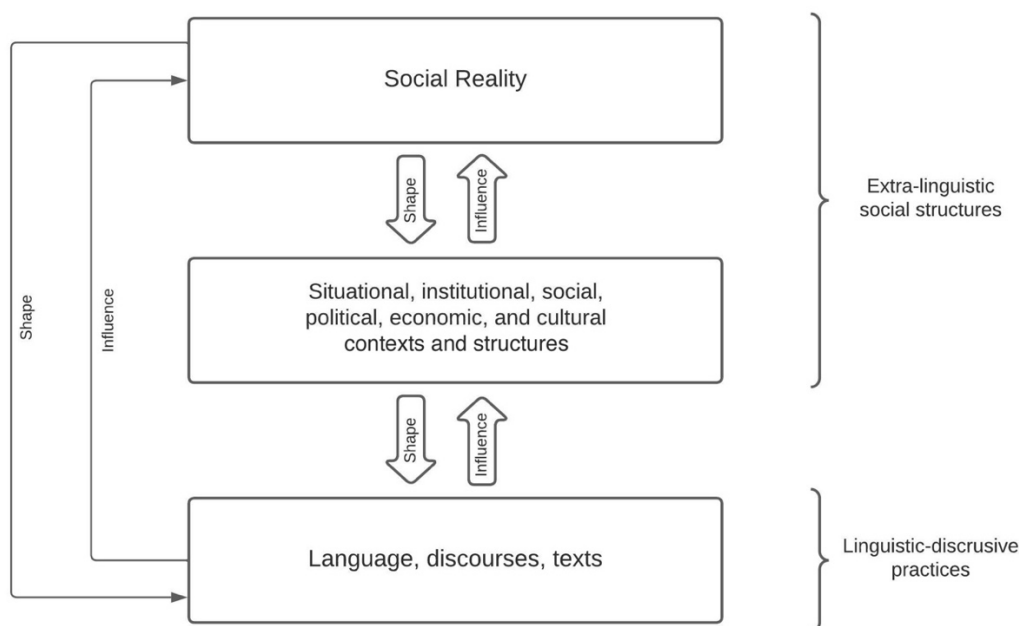
Source: Author

In practical terms, the CDA stems from different linguistic approaches including critical linguistics, classical rhetoric, text linguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and pragmatics. The CDA emerged in the early 1990s following a symposium of scholars including Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak. The symposium helped the scholars to confront and discuss theories and methods of discourse analysis and to construct a heterogeneous way of considering the CDA (Wodak 2001b: 4). The term critical discourse analysis was introduced in contrast with an allegedly descriptive discourse analysis to better study the political meaning of social critique (Reisigl 2017: 50). According to Flowerdew and Richardson (2017) and Wodak and Meyer (2016), the CDA is considered a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis and comprises various heterogeneous methodological and theoretical approaches such as the discourse-historical approach (Ruth Wodak and colleagues), the socio-cognitive approach (Teun van Dijk), the dialectical-relational approach (Norman Fairclough), the Foucauldian approach (Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Maier) and the social practice approach (Theo van Leeuwen).

3.1.1. The Discourse Historical Approach: A Specific Approach within the CDA Framework

Among the various methodological and theoretical approaches of the CDA, I will concentrate specifically on and apply the discourse historical approach (DHA). The DHA is considered a prominent approach within the framework of the CDA and focuses on the historical and political dimensions of discourses. Anchored in the CDA's broader framework, the DHA helps to capture how discourse influences the political and social reality by emphasising "the practice-related quality of discourses, the context dependence of discourses, and the constructed as well as the constitutive character of discourse" (Reisigl 2017: 49). As such, the DHA makes it possible to see how reality is constructed in various context-dependent social fields, spaces and genres and to study situated socio-political and historical contextualities (Rheindorf and Wodak 2018). As argued by Wodak (2001a: 65):

> In investigating historical, organizational and political topics and texts, the discourse-historical approach attempts to integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive events are embedded.

Reisigl (2017: 51-52) declares that discourse *per se* is intended as a communicative and interactional macro-unit transcending the unit of a single text. The discursive units of discourse are linked by a macro-topic divided into various topics, sub-topics and content-related argumentation schemes. Furthermore, discourse is situated within specific situated fields of action that form the frames (i.e. the constitution of social order) of discourses. As a result, discourse helps to organise, (re)produce and transform social relationships, institutions, knowledge and ideologies, identities and subjects. In the DHA, the historical dimension of the discourse, in particular, is taken into account because discourse adapts to and is adapted from social and historical changes. Thus, the DHA aims to transcend the discourse's purely linguistic dimension and include not only the historical but also the political, social, economic and cultural dimensions in the interpretation of discursive utterances to integrate available knowledge on the social and political fields in which discourses are embedded:

> On the one hand, the situational, institutional and social settings shape and affect discourses, and on the other, discourses influence discursive as well as non-discursive

social and political processes and actions. In other words, discourses as linguistic social practices can be seen as constituting non-discursive and discursive social practices and, at the same time, as being constituted by them. To put it more precisely: discourse can be understood as a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts that manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as texts, that belong to specific semiotic types. (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 36)

Consequently, the DHA is concerned with discourses around various themes, including discrimination (e.g. racism, ethnicism, nationalism, xenophobia), politics/policy/polity (e.g. nation-building, European Union, migration, asylum, language policy, populism) and identity (e.g. national and supranational identity, linguistic identity) (Reisigl 2017: 48).

Ruth Wodak (2001a: 72-73) developed several discourse-analytical tools to explore the linguistic and rhetorical means of texts and study the discrimination of people through the DHA. Wodak and her colleague Martin Reisigl (2001: 13) have used this framework to analyse how people are discriminated against based on their ethnicity or race, as "the discourse historical approach is presented as a context-sensitive theory that follows a complex concept of social critique and focuses on the historical and political dimension of discursive actions". The DHA is based on five pillars designed to explore the discursive elements and strategies of positive self- and negative other-representation used in discourses (see Table 3.1). These strategies of self- and other-representation are used, in particular, to understand the discursive construction of "us" and "them" that contributes to reproducing discrimination through discourses of identity and difference.

Table 3.1 – Strategies of self- and other-representation used in discrimination processes

	Objectives	Linguistic Devices	Issues
Referential strategies	Construction of in- and out-groups	Membership categorisation (us vs them)	How are persons linguistically named and referred to?
Predicational strategies	Labelling social actors positively or negatively, deprecatingly or appreciatively	Stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits Implicit and explicit predicates	Which traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them?
Argumentation strategies	Justification of positive or negative attributions	Topoi used to justify political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or preferential treatment	By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify and legitimise the exclusion, discrimination, suppression or exploitation of others?
Perspectivation and framing strategies	Expressing involvement	Reporting, description, narration or quotations	From what point of view are these designations, attributions and arguments expressed?
Intensification and mitigation strategies	Modifying the epistemic nature of a proposition	Intensifying or mitigating the locutory force of discriminatory utterances	Are the respective discriminatory utterances articulated overtly, intensified or mitigated?

Source: Adapted from Reisigl and Wodak (2001), Reisigl (2017) and Wodak (2001a)

Besides the strategies of self- and other-representation, topics represent important linguistic means (or devices) to investigate within the DHA and explore the most salient themes and information provided within specific discourses. They confer the topical structure of texts (e.g. integration and security, over-foreignization, language and culture) (Wodak 2001a: 78). Van Dijk (1991: 72) writes that topics can be defined as follows:

> In more theoretical terms, topics are defined as semantic macro-structures. These global, overall meaning structures of a text consist of a hierarchically arranged set of macro-propositions, which are derived from the meanings (propositions) of the sentences of the text by way of macro-rules. These rules reduce the complex information of the text to its essential gist (…) Each of these summarizing macro-propositions is what we call topic. The overall meaning of a text consists of a hierarchy of such topics, because each series of topics may in turn be summarized again at a higher level.

Importantly, discourses are considered to be anchored within specific fields of action and genres. On the one hand, according to Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 36), the fields of action can be defined by the social reality that constitutes and frames the discourse – in other words, the different functions or institutionalised aims of discursive practices through the situations, institutional frames and social structures in which they are embedded. Law making, political advertising or self-presentation are specific functions within the field of political action. On the other hand, the genres can be defined by the general features and structures of the semiotic type, that is, the institutionalised linguistic actions and activities to which a text belongs (e.g. laws, press conferences, inaugural speeches, elections brochures or interviews). As discourses are conceptualised as influencing social and political processes and being simultaneously affected by these situational social and political settings, the fields of action and genres are considered to constitute the contexts in which these discourses are performed in a dialectical relationship (Wodak 2001a: 66-67).

As mentioned, the DHA puts a special emphasis on the historical, political, social, economic and cultural dimensions of context. To take the notion of context fully into consideration, the DHA is based on a triangulatory approach (Rheindorf 2022) in which discourses must be analysed not only in their immediate context (i.e. micro-level) but also in their broader contexts, which include the meso- and macro-levels (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 – The different context dimensions within the DHA

	Dimensions of context	Linguistic Devices
Micro-level	Immediate language	Semantic prosody of a single utterance (i.e. particularities and connotations, implications)
	Intertextual and interdiscursive relationship	Relationship between different utterances, texts, genres, discourses
Meso-level	Extra-linguistic social variables (i.e. social factors and institutional frames)	Context of the situation (i.e. situation, place, time, political orientation, membership)
Macro-level	Socio-political and historical context	History and politics to which the discourse is related

Source: Adapted from Fairclough (1993) and Reisigl and Wodak (2001)

By exploring the strategies of self- and other-representation, topics, fields of action, genres and context dimensions, the DHA makes it possible to conduct a problem-oriented and interdisciplinary perspective by focusing extensively on the historical, political, social, economic and cultural backgrounds in which discursive events are embedded (Reisigl 2017). The next section aims to define how the DHA's different linguistic and rhetorical analytical tools and interrelated features will be used to explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

3.2. Applying the Discourse Historical Approach: Linguistic Analytical Tools for Examining Right-Wing Populist Parties' Discursive Construction of Borders

The DHA is particularly useful for understanding how RWPPs discursively shape and (re)produce borders. By taking into consideration the historical and political dimensional contexts in which RWPPs (re)produce their discourse and perform, the DHA makes it

possible to better capture how such parties contribute to giving specific symbolic and physical meanings to territorial borders within their reference contexts. As argued in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), the underlying assumption is that borders are in motion, shaped by discursive practices through social and political negotiations and, thus, in a constant process of (re)confirmation, contestation and transformation. Recently, Massimiliano Demata (2022) explored the discursive construction of borders in the USA by using the DHA and asserted that the DHA is crucial to exploring the ongoing legitimisation of borders through political discourses for the following reasons:

> The DHA has proved very effective in identifying and analysing the strategies behind discourses of racism and discrimination and the links between ideologies, discourses and texts. I believe it is necessary to develop an approach to discourse as a foundational component of society, as well as to overcome the inevitable limitations that single disciplines might have in dealing with borders (…) While they may seem fixed and eternal, borders, like nations or any other social institutions, are not a "given" that exists unchallenged and in eternity. Their role is constantly negotiated within society, as they often become major talking points for groups who compete for social, cultural and political hegemony in a nation. Clearly, then, an understanding of how borders are *represented and understood* in society is as important as what border actually *are*. It is through discourse that certain notions about borders are construed. It is through discourse that the meaning of borders in the social and cultural understanding of the nation is negotiated. And it is through discourses about borders that a sense of uniqueness in 'our' collective national identity is constructed in opposition to 'other' identities. (Demata 2022: 3)

Accordingly, this chapter aims to develop a research design aimed at applying various discourse-analytical tools of the DHA presented in the previous section to study RWPPs' construction of borders in CBRs.

The units of analysis are based on the bordering discourses of RWPPs in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs (see Figure 3.2). The right-wing populist bordering discourses in these two CBRs are particularly interesting to study because the latter's strong cross-border employment dynamics and advanced forms of cooperation make them among the most integrated regions in Europe. They both exhibit a high degree of functional integration and have some of the highest rates of cross-border labour movement on the continent (see Chapter 4 for more information on this topic).

The empirical chapters focus on the RWPPs operating in the Swiss and French borderlands of both CBRs. These parties include the Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country sub-state

cantonal branches of the Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP) and the Geneva Citizens Movement (Mouvement Citoyens Genevois, MCG) on the Swiss side and the National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN) sub-state local branches operating in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Grand-Est regions, on the French side. Specifically, the Ain/Haute-Savoie RN sub-state section in the Greater Geneva CBR and the Haut-Rhin RN sub-state section in the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR are analysed. These parties are particularly important as they operate in geographical spaces around the national territorial border between Swiss and France and are considered successful on the European landscape (see Chapter 4 for further details).

I deliberately excluded the RWPPs on the German side of the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR and focused solely on the Swiss and French RWPPs for two reasons: firstly, for comparative purposes, as the Greater Geneva CBR has similar Swiss and French RWPPs, and secondly, because the number of French cross-border workers in Switzerland is increasing while the number of German cross-border workers is decreasing (FSO 2021). In addition, the right-wing populist vote in the German borderland region of the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR (the German Land of Baden-Württemberg) is weak and recent.

Figure 3.2 – Units of analysis
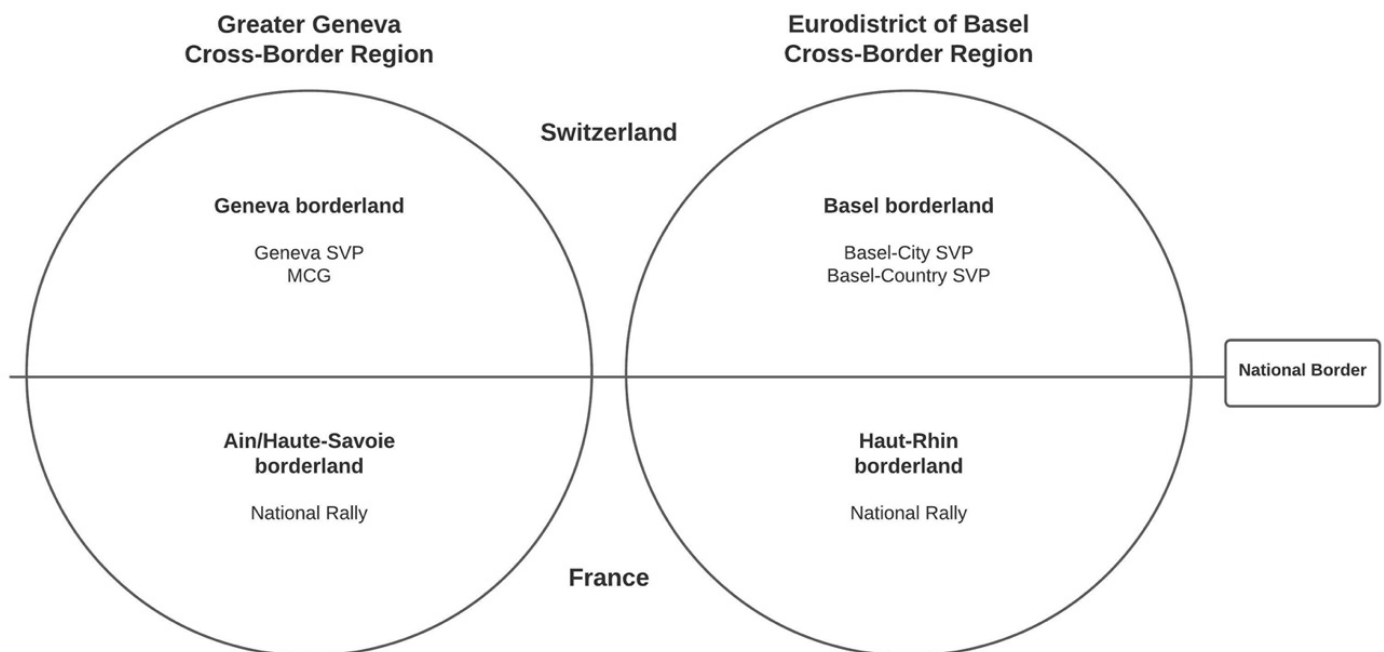
Source: Author

The empirical chapters focus on these units of analysis but in different ways, depending on the RWPP(s), borderland(s), cross-border region(s) and timeframe(s) considered. The following paragraphs present the main research questions, linguistic aims, types of analysis, hypotheses and contextual backgrounds to be explored. I will also explain the reason(s) for selecting specific case studies within the units of analysis presented in Figure 3.2.

In Chapter 5, I will examine how RWPPs shape border issues by mapping the topical structures of their discourses. As explained in the previous section, topics represent semantic macro-structures of texts. They provide the overall meaning structures of a text or the most important themes in discourses (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Van Dijk 1991). I investigate how the RWPPs' discourses on borders are mapped around specific topics that relate to the construction of borders as physical or symbolical devices (i.e. through the use of direct and indirect border issues). To this end, I conduct a comparative analysis of right-wing populist discursive outcomes within and between the Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs (i.e. Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP; MCG; Ain/Haute-Savoie and Haut-Rhin RN) during the first phases of the Covid-19 pandemic, from 1 January to 31 August 2020. Studies have suggested that RWPPs capitalised on the Covid-19 pandemic by taking a stand against transnational flows and promote spatial aspects of identities (Bobba and Hubé 2021; Casaglia et al. 2020). By comparing the right-wing populist discourse between and within both CBRs, including all units of analysis presented in Figure 3.2, I aim to gain insight into how bordering discourses unfold in response to specific (endogenous and exogeneous) contextual factors. Thus, the research questions and hypotheses are as follows:

RQ1: What kinds of border issues did RWPPs discursively frame in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict Basel CBRs during the Covid-19 pandemic?

RQ2: Are there similarities and differences in how RWPPs discursively shape border issues between and within the two CBRs?

H1: RWPPs discursively shape borders as both material and symbolic entities by using direct and indirect border issues.

H2: By considering the context-dependency of populist discourse, different discursive outcomes appear between and within both CBRs. These differences would depend on endogenous and exogenous contextual factors, such as parties' organisational structures and ideological supply, the institutional, functional and structural dynamics at stake in the two CBRs and the political and party systems within which the parties operate.

In Chapter 6, I will explore the bordering narratives arising within RWPPs' discourses on migration and borders by exploring linguistic and rhetorical argumentation strategies. As presented in Table 3.1, argumentation strategies are defined by the justification of political inclusion or exclusion. As such, they are part of the argumentation and justify the transition from arguments to conclusions (Wodak 2001a). This chapter includes a comparative analysis of how the Geneva SVP and the MCG discursively construct borders through specific bordering narratives, which are a set of bordering discourses used to construct socio-political issues relating to migration and borders. The chapter also examines the argumentation strategies employed. As in Chapter 5, I focus on the first phases of the Covid-19 pandemic as a unique context, with an emphasis on the Geneva borderland, from 1 January to 31 August 2020. I focus especially on both RWPPs operating in the Geneva borderland because its share of the influx of cross-border workers is the highest in Switzerland. Furthermore, while being strongly functionally integrated, the presence of strong economic differentials between both sides of the border in the Greater Geneva CBR leads to stronger cross-border grievances. This represents an interesting case to investigate the bordering discourses related to immigration and borders. The research questions and hypotheses are as follows:

RQ1: Which bordering narratives are present in the anti-immigration and border discourse of RWPPs operating in the Geneva borderland during the Covid-19 pandemic?

RQ2: How did the bordering narratives evolve during the different phases of the pandemic (i.e. before, during and after the partial closure of state borders)?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences in how the Geneva SVP and the MCG discursively shape bordering narratives?

H1: The Covid-19 pandemic leads to a strong re-bordering narrative, with both RWPPs exploiting the pandemic to adopt a radical discourse on migration and borders.

H2: The bordering narratives are context-dependent and adapt to the different phases of the pandemic, including before, during and after the partial closure of state borders.

H3: The differences in how RWPPs shape bordering narratives relate to the ideological supply they provide.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I investigate how RWPPs contribute to the discursive shaping of borders through multiple scales when constructing the antagonism between the "people" and the "elites" (i.e. symbolic multi-scalar border framing). As presented in Table 3.1, referential strategies explore how people are linguistically referred to by means of the membership categorisation of "us" *versus* "them" (i.e. the construction of in- and out-

groups). In addition, I use a scale analysis to investigate referential strategies, that is, explore at which scales (state-bordered region, cross-border region, national, European, global) the in- and out-groups are referred to in order to explore the multi-scalar symbolic construction of borders. To this end, I focus on the Geneva and Basel borderlands during sub-state cantonal elections as two distinct case studies. Sub-state elections make it possible to delve into the RWPPs' electoral manifestos, which form a solid basis for understanding their ideological supply during electoral campaigns (Braun and Schmitt 2020). In this chapter, I specifically focus on the Geneva and Basel borderlands as they are part of the Swiss federal multi-level political system and, thus, provide compelling case studies to better understand how the tensions between party (de)centralisation and different socio-political and territorial settings could contribute to creating different models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing. The research questions and hypotheses are as follows:

RQ1: How do RWPPs contribute to symbolically shaping borders through multiple scales in the Geneva and Basel borderlands during sub-state cantonal elections?

RQ2: How could different models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing unfold when considering the construction of "the people" and "the elites" in a Manichean antagonistic division?

H1: The RWPPs contribute to symbolically shaping borders through multiple scales by using the "jumping scales" strategy, mobilising various spaces of dependence and engagement when discursively constructing the antagonism between "the people" and "the elites".

H2: The discursive construction of borders through multiple scales depends on the degrees of "regionalisation" of functional, institutional and territorial identity interests, leading to different types (cross-regional or cross-national) of symbolic multi-scalar border framing.

H3: The various degrees of "regionalisation" of functional, institutional and territorial identity interests in each borderland lead RWPPs to provide discourses either with or without regionalism, with the spaces of dependence unfolding at either the regional or the national scale.

As shown in the previous section, discourses are considered to be embedded (in a dialectical relationship) in specific fields of action and genres. As presented in Figure 3.3, I will focus on the fields of action of political advertising, marketing and propaganda and party-internal development of an informed opinion. This choice aims to focus especially on direct party communication to grasp how RWPPs (re)produce and share their ideological, social and political commitments in a unidirectional nature (i.e. in a top-down fashion, that is, from RWPPs to the public). By focusing on Facebook posts, tweets, the official party

newspaper, official party releases and parties' election manifestos, this research aims to focus not only on traditional but also on social media to better understand how ideological, social and political issues are represented in RWPPs' discourses. Facebook posts and tweets are taken into consideration as they are considered digital media that are gaining importance in the construction of everyday social discourses and the consolidation of attitudes and discourses (KhosraviNik and Unger 2016; Törnberg and Törnberg 2016).

Figure 3.3 – Fields of action and genres of the empirical data
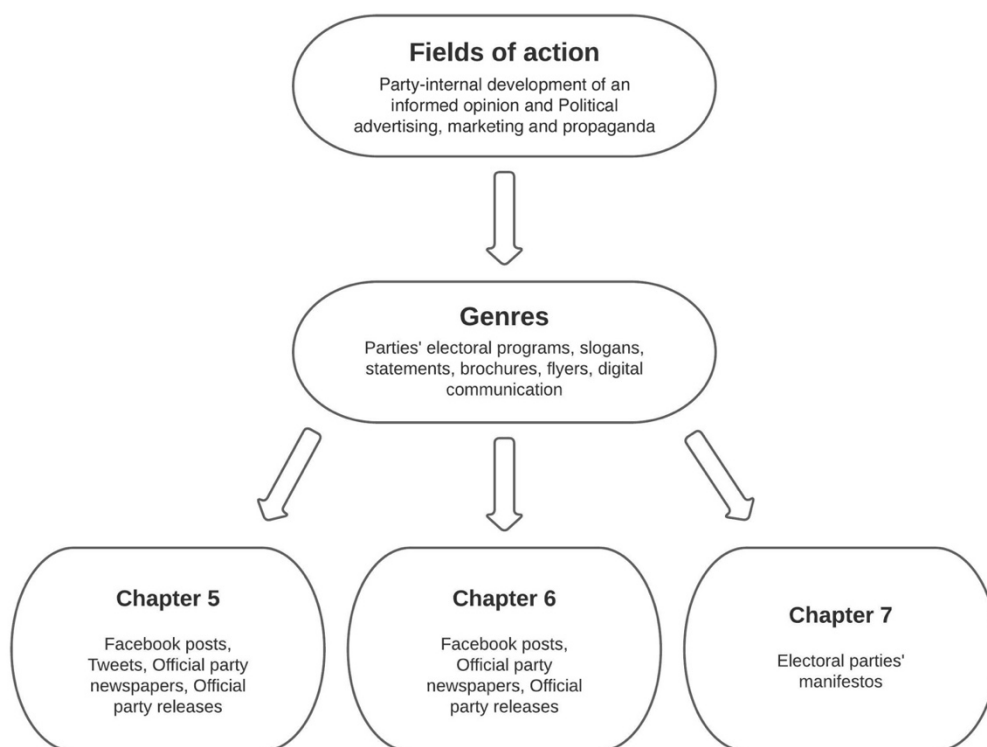
Source: Adapted from Wodak (2001a)

Finally, as argued elsewhere, the historical, political, social, economic and cultural contextual dimensions are very important within the DHA to transcend the pure linguistic dimension of discourses. These contextual dimensions are crucial to understanding the populist frames (see Chapter 2) nurturing people's disenchantment. Table 3.3 presents the contextual dimensions of each empirical chapter's micro-, meso- and macro-levels.

Table 3.3 – Contextual micro-, meso- and macro-levels' dimensions of the empirical data

	Micro-Level	Meso-Level	Macro-Level
Chapter 5	Facebook posts, tweets, official party newspapers, official party releases	The Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel cross-border regions' political, social, economic and cultural configurations	First phases of the Covid-19 pandemic
Chapter 6	Facebook posts, official party newspapers, official party releases	Geneva borderland's political, social, economic and cultural configurations	First phases of the Covid-19 pandemic
Chapter 7	Election manifestos	Geneva and Basel borderlands' political, social, economic and cultural configurations	Sub-state cantonal elections

Source: Author

In the various empirical chapters, the DHA discourse-analytical tools are applied by using MAXQDA software. The next section aims to describe and explain how linguistic research has been conducted with the help of this qualitative data analysis software.

3.2.1. Using Qualitative Data Analysis Software to Apply the DHA: The Functionalities of MAXQDA

MAXQDA is a software used for qualitative and mix-method research (Gizzi and Rädiker 2021; Woolf and Silver 2017) and has been recognised as a useful tool to apply the CDA in an interdisciplinary fashion as it belongs to the family of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (Kuckartz and Rädiker 2019). Furthermore, as argued by Leimbigler (2021: 132), MAXQDA is particularly effective when studying political discourses:

> MAXQDA affords tools that can be used to better understand qualitative analysis. Computer assisted coding can give us a much more nuanced picture of what we are researching. MAXQDA contains many useful tools for finding linkages between different codes and assisting with analysis of large qualitative datasets. Researchers looking at speeches and media samples in particular can use the simple coding and

grouping functions of MAXQDA, as well as the code co-occurrence functions to gain a deeper and more sophisticated analysis of the discourses and frames in speech and media samples.

MAXQDA proved to be an efficient analysis tool for the purposes of this research as it facilitated the understanding and analysis of the complex articulation of DHA discourse-analytical tools. I used some of its main functionalities, like the (1) coding (i.e. conceptualising data), (2) code frequencies (i.e. visualising data) and (3) code relations browser (i.e. visualising data) functions, to explore the construction of borders within RWPPs' discourses.

Practically, MAXQDA makes it possible to import text data (among others), classify, organise and manage them among different groups and to edit them by using various qualitative tools. The coding functionality allowed me to create complex inductive code (and sub-code) systems to analyse the construction of in- and out-groups, the topics, the argumentation strategies (or *topoi*) and the scales within discourses. These codes and sub-codes allowed me to code segments of text relating to the various analytical aims I mentioned above to run qualitative analyses. The code frequencies functionality was useful for exploring how many segments and documents have been coded with selected codes and sub-codes. Finally, the code relations browser functionality was useful for visualising the codes and sub-codes co-occurrences, that is, for exploring the relationships between codes and sub-codes that co-occur within a document or group of documents.

Table 3.4 shows from an empirical perspective which functionalities of MAXQDA were used for each empirical chapter regarding their linguistic aims.

Table 3.4 – MAXQDA functionalities used to explore the linguistic aims of the empirical chapters

	Linguistic aim	**MAXQDA analytical tools**
Chapter 5	Mapping discourses' topical structures	Coding functionality to map the topics and sub-topics and Code frequencies functionality to explore the most important themes in discourses
Chapter 6	Exploring discourses' argumentation strategies	Coding functionality to map the topics, sub-topics and related *topoi* and Code relations browser

		to explore the most prominent combinations
Chapter 7	Exploring referential strategies through a multi-scalar approach	Coding functionality to map the in- and out-groups and the scales and Code relations browser to explore at which scales the in- and out-groups are prominently mentioned

Source: Author

As mentioned above, the discursive units of analysis are not single words but segments of text that correspond to sequences of utterances and sentences, distinct propositions, topics or communicative functions in a text (Upton and Cohen, 2009). Each segment can be coded with one or more codes or sub-codes depending on its content. For instance, in Chapter 5, each segment has been coded with one or more topics relating to border issues. In Chapter 6, each segment has been coded with one or more argumentation strategies relating to migration and borders. Finally, in Chapter 7, each segment has been coded with one or more referential strategies and with one or more scales at which the discursive framing of "the people" and "the elites" unfolded.

The empirical material was initially coded inductively to create distinct codebooks relating to the RQs and linguistic means of each empirical chapter. These codebooks were refined after a pilot analysis of the corresponding data. The first round of inductive coding was then completed and subsequently controlled with a second reading of the data to ensure coding reliability and representativeness.

To provide a tangible example, if a text segment is articulated around criticism of the European Union for imposing free movement of persons and thus increasing the unemployment share for local residents due to the hiring of cheaper EU labour forces, the coding would unfold as follows (see the empirical chapters for more details): In Chapter 5, the segment would be coded with the topics of European Union, Unemployment, Hiring of local workers and Migration as a threat to economy. In Chapter 6, the segment would be coded with the topics of Agreements and Employment and the topos of burden. In Chapter 7, the segment would be coded with local residents as an in-group and the European

Union as an out-group. The same segment would also be coded with the borderland region and European scales.

3.3. Conclusion: The Assets of Using the Discourse Historical Approach to Explore Right-Wing Populist Parties' Construction of Borders

By establishing a dialectical relationship between discourses and the social and political contexts in which they are embedded, the DHA promotes a constructivist perspective on doing qualitative and empirical research. By anchoring this research in the interdisciplinary DHA framework, it is my contention that the RWPP's discourses on borders affect and are affected by the institutional setting in which these parties operate and compete and, thus, have the power to (re)shape the social and political reality and promote specific ideologies that reverberate within the population. As argued by Casaglia and Laine (2017: 95), "borders are the products of a social and political negotiation of space, and at the same time condition how societies and individuals shape their strategies and identities, and thus how the landscape is shaped".

Thus, using the DHA to explore and understand how the RWPPs discursively shape borders within CBRs is crucial to debunking the ideologies they display and to gaining a better understanding of and preventing the spread of discriminatory discourses relating to the construction of borders. The discourse-analytical tools offered by the DHA – that is, the strategies of self- and other representation – and the analysis of topics, fields of action, genres and context dimensions are useful and powerful tools to apprehend RWPPs' discourses and deconstruct the normalisation and legitimisation of their exclusionary politics (Wodak 2015; 2021).

Most importantly, by considering the historical, political, social, economic and cultural dimensional contexts in which these discourses are embedded, the DHA allows us to better understand how the right-wing populist discursive practices influence and are influenced by the institutions and situations to which they belong and how such populist frames allow RWPPs to nurture people's disenchantments. Demata (2022) asserts that, "[d]espite the apparent stability projected by borders as instruments of nations' legitimisation, their

function has changed diachronically and may also differ according to the geopolitical context of the nations they separate". Given the ongoing complex political, social and cultural challenges and cleavages that we are facing, it is of the utmost importance to explore the dialectical relationship between discourses and their contexts, as the traditional right-wing populist rhetoric is still part of and legitimised in contemporary political discourses: "Clearly, politicians still resort to traditional patterns of rhetoric; they continue to construct a dichotomized world of "us" and "them", filled with enemies and scapegoats that serve to draw attention away from urgent, complex issues" (Wodak and Rheindorf 2022: 3).

4. Delving into the Contexts: Political and Party Systems, Right-Wing Populist Parties and Cross-Border Regions

This chapter contextualises the Swiss and French political and party systems, the rise of the right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) within their national and cross-border political, institutional and structural frameworks and the historical development of the cross-border regions (CBRs) of Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel. In so doing, the chapter will seek to answer the following questions: What are the specific institutional and structural features of the French and Swiss political and party systems? What are the ideological, electoral and organisational peculiarities of the particular RWPPs (i.e. the Swiss People's Party, the Geneva Citizens' Movement and the National Rally), and how did they evolve within their distinct political and party systems? How did they adapt to the multi-level institutional configurations in which they are embedded by competing at the sub-national level? And finally, what are the peculiarities of the Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs' functional, structural and institutional integration, and how did these regions develop?

In the first place, and as laid out in the methodological chapter (Chapter 3), the critical discourse analysis (CDA) considers discourse as a form of social practice that regulates social structures (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). As such, there is a strong focus on the contextual functions of language use, which must be taken into account to understand the discourse production *per se* in a dialectical relationship (Wodak and Meyer 2016). More specifically, the discourse historical approach (DHA) understands the context as mainly historical since historical developments are considered to have a profound impact on the political discourse (Wodak 2001a). Therefore, to better understand how RWPPs have been influenced by and have influenced the political and institutional structures in which they compete, this chapters aims to explore the political and institutional contexts in which these parties have evolved.

It is worth emphasising that the opportunities for and constraints on RWPPs to mobilise and adjust themselves to the institutional, political and structural arenas in which they develop and compete greatly depend on the context in which such parties perform (Crépon,

Dézé, and Mayer 2015; Elias, Szöcsik, and Zuber 2015). According to Baloge and Hubé (2018), it is important to take into account the different contexts in which political parties compete because they influence the outputs and representations of political agents. Depending on the specific electoral and institutional arenas, RWPPs must adapt to key contextual opportunities to take advantage of the various resources offered by the political institutions in which they run (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021; Mazzoleni 2008; Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel 2018; Skenderovic and Mazzoleni 2007).

According to Deschouwer (2006), the primacy of the national scale in the study of party politics has often been taken for granted and left unexamined in the field of political science, even though political parties evolve in complex institutional multi-level systems. This chapter does not take the national level of the Swiss and French political and institutional contexts for granted; instead, it explores how the specific features of both the Swiss and the French political and party systems have influenced the rise of RWPPs at the national, regional and cross-border levels. It does this by highlighting how the contextual multi-level political and territorial configurations that have taken shape within the framework of globalisation and European integration have contributed to consolidating and legitimising the political relevance of cross-border and sub-state scales in economic, political and symbolic terms (Sohn 2018). As argued in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), this is the result of the territorial decentralisation of politics across several territorial levels (Swenden and Maddens 2008; Keating 2021). Consequently, understanding the specific features of the Swiss and French political and party systems and their impact on multi-level political and territorial configurations and party mobilisation is crucial to understanding how RWPPs have developed not only at the national level but also at the regional and cross-border territorial scales. Using a cross-border perspective that goes beyond the national level *per se* helps to gain a better understanding of the multi-scalar discursive construction of borders.

At first glance, while the Swiss and French political and party systems are both partly characterised by their multi-level configurations, they present distinct forms of institutionalisation. On the one hand, the Swiss political system can be considered strongly decentralised and provides powerful political tools (e.g. direct democracy, proportional electoral system and the rule of concordance) for challenger parties to gain electoral visibility and representation, induce policy changes and successfully compete in the party system (Mazzoleni 2008). On the other hand, the French political system is strongly centralised and nationalised as it is structured around the primacy of the State (Caramani

2004). In this context, challenger parties face greater difficulty competing and gaining electoral visibility and representation because of the constraints imposed by the two-ballot majoritarian electoral system and the resulting importance of building coalitions, as well as the majoritarian parties' cartelisation in the party system (Ivaldi 2018a). Accordingly, the distinct Swiss and French political and institutional configurations, as well as the resulting opportunities, constraints and resources that they offer, have had a strong impact on RWPPs' development and political strategies.

All of the RWPPs studied in this research are characterised as relevant and successful in the Western European landscape, but they differ with respect to their ideology, organisation and evolution (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016a; Mudde 2007; van Kessel 2015). On the Swiss side, while the Geneva Citizens' Movement (MCG) embodies a regionalist party competing in the canton of Geneva, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) underwent a process of nationalisation during the 1990s. At the same time, the sub-state SVP cantonal branches still enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy regarding the party's interest at the regional level. As such, the SVP can be labelled as both centralised and decentralised because it oscillates between state-wide centralisation and sub-state autonomy. By contrast, on the French side, the National Rally (RN) is strongly centralised and organised around the party's leadership, which constitutes the node of all political decisions.

The chapter is organised as follows. The first section explores the specificities of the Swiss political and party system, the rise and development of the SVP and its sub-state cantonal branches (Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country) and the MCG. The second section investigates the French political and party system, the rise and development of the RN and its regional branches (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Grand Est). The third part delves into the institutional, structural and functional specificities of the Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel cross-border regions (CBRs), which are considered to be well integrated with the European landscape. Finally, to better grasp the mobilisation and competition patterns of RWPPs, the concluding remarks will underscore the importance of considering the contextual multi-level dynamics at play in the specific political and party systems and multi-scalar territorial configurations.

4.1. Understanding the Swiss Political and Party Systems

Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni (2021) assert that Switzerland is one of the most stable democracies in the world. The Swiss political system has been seen as a model for political integration, consensus democracy, federalism and direct-democratic decision-making since the founding of the modern Swiss state (i.e. the Confederation) in 1848 (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). Federalism and direct democracy are fundamental political institutions of the Swiss political system and are crucial to understanding the country's party system.

Federalism is one of the core elements of Switzerland's political system (Vatter 2022). As argued by Kriesi (1998) and Kriesi and Trechsel (2008), one of the main characteristics of Swiss federalism is the political system's composition of 26 analogous sub-systems named cantons. These sub-systems are based on territorial criteria and have substantial autonomy, and their existence is guaranteed by Art. 3 of the Swiss constitution.[11] The cantons are autonomous, as each has its own constitution, chooses its political authorities, assigns its political competencies and defines the conditions and contents relating to citizens' rights. Furthermore, each has a distinct judicial, fiscal, health and school system. As such, the cantons have extensive legislative rights and can legislate on all issues that are not automatically delegated to the Confederation – i.e. the Federal Council (executive power), the Federal Assembly (legislative power) and the Federal Administration. This delegation is known as the subsidiarity principle. Finally, the cantons are in charge of implementing most federal laws. As Mueller (2015a: 109) explains, this results in a triple identity of federal balance: "the balance that keeps Switzerland together then would seem to be multidimensional (in a policy sense), multi-layered (local, cantonal and federal) and subject to temporal change."

In this sense, the Swiss federal system can be labelled as decentralised: There is no apparent uniformity between the cantons as they are based on different languages, religions and cultures (Vatter 2022). However, Mueller (2015b) shows that different forms of (de)centralisation can be observed between the cantons depending on the physical extension of territories, socio-cultural factors and the policies led by political parties. At the same

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[11] "The cantons are sovereign except to the extent that their sovereignty is limited by the Federal Constitution. They exercise all rights that are not vested in the Confederation."

time, there is a strong interdependence between the Confederation and the cantonal sub-systems:

> Compared to most federal systems, the autonomy of the Swiss cantons vis-à-vis the federal level of government is rather significant. By contrast, the autonomy of the federal level in relation to the cantonal level is quite limited, as cantons, together with the people, constitute the two fundamental organs on which the federal state is based. (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008: 38)

Accordingly, two institutions allow the cantons to interfere in federal legislation: The upper house of the Federal Assembly (i.e. the Council of States)[12] and the cantonal majority for certain types of referenda and votes. With regard to the former, the population of each canton must elect two MPs to the upper house of the Federal Assembly, except for the former half-cantons, which have one seat (Obwalden, Nidwalden, Basel-City, Basel-Country, Appenzell Inner Rhodes and Appenzell Outer Rhodes), meaning that the cantons' electorates are represented in the federal legislative government; with regard to the latter, cantons can play a significant role in the realm of direct democracy. They have one vote for certain referendum ballots (and half a vote for the half-cantons) representing their popular majority, meaning that the cantons wield substantial power in direct-democratic decision-making. In addition, the cantons can submit parliamentary initiatives to block policies proposed by the Federal Parliament at the end of the decision-making process and are consulted on federal law projects. Federal policies are implemented at the sub-national level, meaning that the Confederation depends on the cantons for the implementation of federally designed programmes (Vatter 2022: 149). Thus, there is a substantial degree of cooperation between the Confederation and the cantons. The Confederation has a dominant position regarding public finances and taxation, the national economy and transport and social security issues, while the cantons play a dominant role regarding justice and police, education and healthcare issues.

Swiss federalism is organised around three pillars: the Confederation, the cantons and the municipalities (i.e. communes). The latter (i.e. the third layer of government) plays a major

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[12] The Swiss political system is based on the model of perfect bicameralism. The federal legislative power (i.e. the Federal Assembly) consists of two chambers: the National Council (lower house of the Federal Assembly) and the Council of States (upper house of the Federal Assembly). Each of them has equal rights: The National Council represents the people, and the Council of States represents the cantons (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008; Linder and Mueller 2021).

role in general administration, culture and leisure, the protection of the environment and regional development planning issues. The relationship between the Confederation and the cantons *de facto* allows municipalities to legislate on any object not legislated by the cantons (Vatter 2022: 137). Regarding finances, both cantons and municipalities have the right to collect taxes in order to remain independent. As argued by Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 42), the Swiss political system is organised in a complex manner around the coordination among these three levels of government. Linder and Mueller (2021: 64) state that "the Swiss solution exhibits a marked preference for extensive cantonal and local autonomy, thus preventing any uncontrolled growth in the power of the federation".

The second fundamental political institution is direct democracy. The Swiss political system provides tools of direct democracy that can have a profound impact on the decision-making process. While Switzerland is not the only country providing such democratic mechanisms, Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 49) elaborate on Switzerland's uniqueness:

> Nowhere are these more developed than in Switzerland (…), and unlike anywhere else, the Swiss institutions of direct democracy embody a truly system-formative device, greatly impacting on party competition, government, Parliament, the legislative process and policy making at all levels of the federal state.

The first tool of direct democracy can be traced back to the 1848 Swiss Constitution with the mandatory referendum for constitutional amendments, meaning that any amendments to the Constitution need to be approved by a double majority of the people and the cantons.[13]

To date, two possibilities have arisen from direct democracy: the referendum and the popular initiative. While the former makes it possible to contest any law adopted by Parliament, the latter allows seeking partial amendments to the Constitution (Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni 2021). On the one hand, a referendum can block policies proposed by the Federal Parliament at the end of the decision-making process, thereby functioning as a veto. This means that any amendment to the Constitution must be submitted for approval to the cantons and the people in a double majority (i.e. both a majority of the people and a majority of the cantons must vote in favour). On the other hand, the referendum can be optional, meaning that at least 50,000 voters or eight cantons can propose

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[13] As explained by Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 52), "the requirement of the double majority is a direct consequence of the country's federal structure and was initially designed as a safeguard against the tyranny of the majority by the most populated cantons."

modifications to any federal legislation change within 100 days after the law's publication. This type of referendum only requires the popular majority to be enforced. Finally, unlike a referendum, the popular initiative generally takes place at the beginning of the decision-making process. Throughout the popular initiative, any Swiss citizen or political party can decide to put an issue on the political agenda to revise the Swiss Constitution if the federal government has failed to do so. A popular initiative must gather 100,000 signatures and – like a mandatory referendum – must be submitted for approval by a double majority of the cantons and the people (Stadelmann-Steffen and Leemann 2022). As argued by Linder and Mueller (2021), optional referenda and popular initiatives leave the political parties and the people to decide what they aim to vote on. At the same time, the typical example of a referendum constrains the government to consult Parliament and consider the interests of political parties:

> The perceived omnipresent risk of a referendum being organised leads the federal authorities to avoid the referendum trap by two means: first, an intensive pre-parliamentary consultation phase allows ascertaining the degree of disapproval by different actors. Second, in taking into account opposing views that are dangerous enough to bring everything down, the government then presents a legislative bill to parliament that is already a compromise backed by a large coalition of interest groups and political parties. (Linder and Mueller 2021: 131)

Regarding the Swiss party system, Varone et al. (2014: 107) point out that it represents "a paradigmatic case of stability, with low electoral volatility and only small changes in party strengths across elections". Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 84) define the Swiss party system as historically fragmented (relating to the significant social and cultural cleavages in the Swiss federalist structure), relatively stable (as a result of the consensual political culture) and dominated by moderate right-wing parties. The relative stability of the Swiss party system can be observed in the composition of the Federal Council, as it remained unchanged from 1959 to 2003, with the so-called magic formula consisting of two seats for the Social Democrats, two for the Liberals, two for the Christian Democrats and one for the Swiss People's Party. In 2003, however, a historic change occurred in the government coalition, as the Christian Democrats lost one of their seats to the Swiss People's Party. Accordingly, the composition of the federal executive is now represented by two seats for the Social Democrats, two for the Liberals, one for the Christian Democrats and two for the Swiss

People's Party. This political earthquake challenged the stability and volatility of the Swiss party system (Ladner, Schwarz, and Fivaz 2022).

Swiss parties are considered weak organisations compared with parties in other Western democracies as they are underfunded and understaffed and lack resources (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). Furthermore, federalism strongly weakens parties at the national level (Skenderovic and Mazzoleni 2007: 110). The culturally heterogeneous structure of the Swiss political system – with four languages, a strong form of federalism, the small size of the country and a political system composed predominantly of non-professional MPs – reinforces the weakness of party positions (Favero 2021). This can also be explained by the fact that Switzerland's political parties are private organisations and do not have to fulfil specific requirements (Ladner, Schwarz, and Fivaz 2022). As suggested by Kriesi and Techsel (2008: 90):

> Swiss federalism has profoundly marked the party system. Traditionally, the parties have positioned themselves first of all in the cantonal context. As a result, the party systems varied from one canton to the next, with the national parties hardly constituting more than federations of the cantonal parties trying to maintain a precarious unity at the federal level.

According to Mazzoleni (2008: 63), the success of political parties within their political arenas depends on the political system's opportunities and the party's capacity to mobilise a large electorate. He argues that, in the Swiss political system, direct democracy, the proportional electoral system and the rule of concordance are the three main tools that can lead to political parties achieving success at the ballot box. These three tools are described below.

Firstly, direct democracy is a powerful tool that challenger parties can use to impose their ideological and political agenda by attracting political attention, voicing their policy preferences, promoting vote-seeking strategies and inducing policy changes (Varone et al. 2014: 106). Popular initiatives are useful for RWPPs and challenger parties to modify the Constitution for their own purposes and to undermine the consensual rules in the government arena (Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni 2021; Kriesi and Trechsel 2008; Skenderovic and Mazzoleni 2007).

Secondly, the proportional electoral system in Switzerland is a robust tool for oppositional parties to gain seats in government, as they do not have to invest many resources to gain

representation (Linder and Mueller 2021; Skenderovic and Mazzoleni 2007). The proportional system was introduced during the 1919 federal elections and based on setting a system of proportional representation (with the cantons as electoral constituencies) at the National Council, meaning that "the number of seats for each canton corresponds to the size of its population, except for the fact that even the smallest cantons obtain at least one MP in the National Council" (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008: 38).

Finally, the rule of concordance is an informal rule according to which major political parties are represented on the Federal Council in a way that reflects their electoral strength via a majoritarian system (Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni 2021). Accordingly, the most important political parties are generally co-opted into government and permanently remain in the executive (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). This is typically exemplified by the so-called magic formula as a guiding principle of Swiss governance since 1959, which also reflects the major parties' electoral strength (Meuwly 2018). Importantly, the rule of coalition does not apply to the Swiss party system: Parliament is autonomous from the federal executive (i.e. the Federal Council), meaning that the Parliament cannot dissolve it nor bring a vote of no confidence against it (Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni 2021). Furthermore, the rules of direct democracy constrain the political parties to cooperate in order "to reduce the risks of defeat of government policies by referendum" (Linder and Mueller 2021: 156).

To sum up, the institutions of the Swiss political system provide a relatively low level of competition through consensual and well-balanced conflict resolution. However, the challenger and right-wing populist SVP (see next section) disrupted the stability of the Swiss party system by successfully entering the political arena – thanks to the very opportunities provided by the Swiss political system – as an oppositional party and, thus, contributed to a partisan re-alignment in Swiss politics (Skenderovic and Mazzoleni 2007). As such, the SVP contributed to an increase in partisan competition and polarisation and shook the long-standing stability of the Swiss party system (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008).

4.1.1. RWPPs on the Swiss Side: The Rise of the Swiss People's Party and the Geneva Citizens' Movement

The Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP) is the most influential Swiss political party and received 25.6 per cent of the vote in the most recent federal election in 2019, making up the biggest parliamentary group with 53 of the 200 seats in the lower house of the Federal Assembly. As underlined by Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni (2021), the SVP has been the most successful Swiss party in national elections since the 2000s, the RWPP with the largest vote share in national elections in Western Europe and the only RWPP that has continuously been represented on the Federal Council over the past few decades, apart from a brief interruption in 2008.

Ackermann, Zampieri, and Freitag (2018: 548) point out that "unlike other right-wing populist parties in Europe, the SVP does not have a radical or anti-democratic past". Indeed, the SVP was founded in 1971 as a conservative agrarian party to merge the Farmers', Artisans' and Citizens' Party (Bauern-, Gewerbe- und Bürgerparteil, BGB) and the Glarus and Graubünden cantonal sections of the Social-Political Group (Demokratische Partei, DP).

On the one hand, as described by Skenderovic (2017), the BGB had been established as a national party in 1936. Previously, the party had not been a national organisation *per se* but was composed of various cantonal sections known as the Farmers' Party since 1917. The ideology of the Farmers' Party was to take a stand against socialism, anti-militarism and internationalism. In 1929, it managed to have one of its representatives, Rudolf Minger, elected to the Federal Council. At the time, the Farmers' Party was active in the cantons of Aargau, Basel-Country, Bern, Fribourg, Schaffhausen, Ticino, Thurgau, Vaud and Zürich. It became a national entity known as the BGB during a meeting between the different cantonal sections in 1936, when the party already had 24 seats in the Federal Assembly (21 in the lower house and three in the upper house). Since then, the party has always had one of its members on the Swiss Federal Council.

On the other hand, according to Bürgi (2010), the DP was founded as a national party in 1942, during World War II. It operated successfully in the cantons of Graubünden, Glarus and Zürich, and the national party was founded through a merger of older cantonal sections to strengthen the national spirit and direct democracy in order to expand popular rights.

In 1971, the merger of the BGB and the Glarus and Graubünden sections of the DP led to the creation of the SVP.[14] The goal of this merger was to combine both parties' strengths and counter the erosion of their electorates by promoting their policy proposals to employees, the working class and the lower middle class (Ladner 2001). This re-orientation was led by the most influential Bern cantonal section of the SVP and consolidated through its 1971 electoral programme to strengthen themes like ecology, consumer protection and human rights and issues like peasantry militarism, anti-socialism and anti-internationalism (Mazzoleni 2008; Skenderovic 2017).

At the time, there was a growing discrepancy between the Bern and Zürich cantonal sections' campaign styles and visions:

> While both the Zurich and Bern branches have deep agrarian roots, ideological differences between the two have become very noticeable. Bern stuck to a more moderate, conservative line, while Zurich developed a more radical profile as a populist radical right organization (…) As for its ideology, in contrast to the SVP Bern, the SVP branch in Zurich took an aggressive opposition course advocating for more law and order, and restricting integration into international communities. (Favero 2021: 253-254)

Thus, the Zürich section became autonomous from the party's national orientation. Under the presidency of Christoph Blocher, it focused more on controversial issues like asylum, drugs and security (Skenderovic and Mazzoleni 2007).

According to Mazzoleni (2008), the SVP underwent a profound restructuring between the 1980s and the 1990s because of political and ideological radicalisation. This restructuring can be considered the emergence of the "new" SVP, as the party transformed from a centre-right into a right-wing populist party by emphasising identity politics and the issue of Swiss identity and empowering exclusionary beliefs and xenophobic sentiments (Decker 2004; Geden 2006; Jost 2007; Skenderovic 2009). Considering this shift in the party's ideology, the new right-wing orientation focused on defending national integrity and Swiss exceptionalism, keeping up the struggle against immigration and refugees, protecting Swiss neutrality, criticising political elites and empowering moral conservatism by standing against criminality and for law enforcement:

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[14] As explained by Bürgi (2010), the DP's Zürich section joined the Radical Democratic Party (Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei, FDP)

Party officials embraced the view that immigrants, in particular those coming from countries outside Europe, are characterized by their cultural distance from Swiss culture and nation. The government's migration policy was seen as a failure, particularly its policy on asylum and refugees. The party was keen to associate the presence of asylum seekers with a variety of problems in Swiss society, with the rise of crime, and drug problems, with insufficient security in inner cities and with violence in schools and among young people. (Skenderovic and Mazzoleni 2007: 94)

This radical restructuring from an agrarian legacy to a firmly anti-establishment and anti-immigration stance, which developed through a national-populist discourse (Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni 2021; Wodak 2021b), occurred throughout the leadership of the charismatic Christoph Blocher. Blocher became president of the Zürich SVP's cantonal section in 1977. According to Skenderovic and Mazzoleni (2007: 92), the cantonal branch improved its organisational structure and extended its public activities, addressed programmatic questions (through ideological and political polarisation) and modernised the running of election campaigns to improve its electoral success. These actions resulted in the Zürich SVP cantonal section adopting an aggressive style based on harsh rhetoric by attacking State bureaucracy and political establishment through a political agenda focused on asylum, drug policy and law and order issues. This watershed, led by Blocher, who became one of the uncontested leaders of the SVP in the 1990s, radicalised the party and led to the autonomy and institutionalisation of the national SVP by means of centralisation and increasing ideological cohesion. Blocher helped to consolidate and centralise the party by adding considerable human and financial resources, generating an unprecedented level of professionalisation and building a solid reputation for the SVP as a winning party in the electoral and referendum arenas (Albertazzi 2008; Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016).

As underlined by Skenderovic and Mazzoleni (2007), the development of the "new" SVP also meant an increase in the number of SVP cantonal branches: from 15 in the 1990s to 26 (i.e. each Swiss canton had a cantonal section) in 2001. This evolution was led and promoted by the Zürich SVP section under the presidency of Blocher (with the new sections supporting its right-wing political agenda), which helped to build a more cohesive national organisation and to reinforce the position of the Zürich section at the expense of the Bern cantonal branch. In 1996, Zürich SVP member Ueli Maurer (an associate of Christoph Blocher) became president of the national SVP, which also helped to increase the national cohesion of the party and to re-align the right-wing ideological profile of the national organisation.

In the light of these organisational developments, the SVP extended its financial resources and political and administrative support independently from the traditional socio-professional interest groups through professionalised and capital-intensive campaigning during the 1990s (Skenderovic 2009). By running the party in a business-like fashion, Blocher has been a driving force in the nationalisation and transformation process of the "new" SVP. According to Mazzoleni and Rossini (2016), this new entrepreneurial leadership adopted a three-fold party mobilisation strategy by 1) using professionalised and capital-intensive forms of campaigning, 2) strengthening the party's grassroots membership and building a legacy as a mass party and 3) empowering the head office to lead the party across the country. However, although there has been a process to centralise the party at the national level, the sub-state cantonal branches still enjoy significant autonomy – for instance, regarding the representation of the party's interests at the regional level, such as the selection of candidates for cantonal and federal elections, the recruitment of new members and the implementation of cantonal party manifestos.

Following these ideological and organisational shifts, the party found greater electoral success, growing from the fourth-largest national party in 1995 with 14.9 per cent of the total vote share to the largest national party in 1999 with 22.6 per cent of the vote (see Table 4.1). Since 1999, the SVP has been the strongest and most successful party in Switzerland. It receives the largest vote share and constitutes the biggest group in Parliament. It more than doubled its electoral vote share between 1995 and 2015, which is viewed a remarkable achievement in contemporary Swiss politics (Varone et al. 2014). Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni (2021) and Skenderovic (2009) explain that this was the product of some contingent political and structural opportunities that the party seized in the 1990s and 2000s, such as the increased impacts of socio-economic changes fostered by globalisation and growing European integration. Furthermore, party grassroots, substantial financial resources, robust leadership and durable integration within federal institutions played an important role in the SVP party's strategy. Accordingly, the SVP managed to attract the so-called "losers of globalisation", such as unskilled and freelance workers, the unemployed and the lower middle class (Albertazzi 2008; Kriesi et al. 2008; Manatschal 2015; Mazzoleni 2003).

Table 4.1 – Electoral vote share of the SVP in federal elections between 1971 and 2019

	Percentage of vote share	Number of seats in the lower house of the Federal Assembly (out of a total of 200)
1971	11.1%	23
1975	9.9%	21
1979	11.6%	23
1983	11.1%	23
1987	11%	25
1991	11.9%	25
1995	14.9%	29
1999	22.6%	44
2003	26.7%	55
2007	28.9%	62
2011	26.6%	54
2015	29.4%	65
2019	25.6%	53

Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

As a result of this increasing electoral strength, Christoph Blocher was elected as one of the seven members of the Swiss Federal Council on 1 January 2004, which meant that the magic formula of the federal government – a combination that had remained unchanged since 1959, with two seats for the Social Democrats (SP), two for the Liberals (FDP), two for the Christian Democrats (CVP) and one for the SVP – was broken as the SVP gained a second seat at the expense of the CVP. Because he was in the government, Blocher had a considerable influence on the management of public affairs until he was expelled in 2007 because of his controversial style and regular breaking of the consensual rules of Swiss politics:

> Blocher decisively contributed to the tightening of asylum policies, the lowering of government spending and the abandonment of Switzerland's strategic goal to join the European Union (EU). He also repeatedly violated the principle of collegiality by

constantly interfering in the business of other Federal Councillors and criticizing government decisions in public. (Bernhard, Biancalana, and Mazzoleni 2021: 152)

Skenderovic and Mazzoleni (2007: 93) argue that one of the SVP's main achievements – one that helped to fuel the party and strengthen its electoral success – was its referendum campaign in opposition to the question of Switzerland's European integration (i.e. joining the European Economic Area or EEA) on 6 December 1992. As the only party opposed to this referendum initiated by the Federal Council, the SVP's opposition role, especially on issues relating to Swiss identity politics and Euroscepticism (Bernhard, Kriesi, and Weber 2015), was strengthened when 50.3 per cent of Swiss voters rejected the referendum. The ideological combination of cultural protectionism and economic neoliberalism has enabled the SVP to win parliamentary elections and influence the political agenda since 1991, especially by the oppositional party using the means of direct democracy (Church and Vatter 2009; Varone et al. 2014).

Thus, the democratic tools offered by the Swiss political system – i.e. referenda and popular initiatives – have allowed the SVP to promote its ideological radicalisation, anti-establishment attitude and nativist and traditional values (Favero 2021; Mazzoleni 2008). As stated above, and as elaborated by Varone et al. (2014: 106), direct-democratic instruments grant RWPPs the political opportunities to "attract political attention, voice their policy preferences, promote their vote-seeking strategies, and possibly induce policy changes". From an empirical perspective, Biard (2020) demonstrated how the SVP does have a significant impact on Swiss public policy by translating its political agenda into public decisions.

The SVP has launched several successful popular initiatives. Among them, the 2009 Swiss minaret referendum by the Egerkingen committee (most of whose members are SVP members) aimed to prevent the construction of new minarets and mosques in Switzerland. The imitative was approved by 57.5 per cent of Swiss voters and a majority of 19.5 cantons on 29 November 2009. As argued by Betz and Meret (2009) and Betz (2013), the initiative's promoters wanted to defend Swiss national and cultural identity against Islam and promote Christian and Western values (i.e. symbolic nativism and Swiss traditional values). Another crucial initiative launched by the SVP was the 2010 popular initiative to expel foreign criminals. This initiative targeted foreigners who have committed severe infractions and abused social welfare and sought to expel them for between five and 15 years. The initiative was accepted by 52.9 per cent of Swiss voters and a majority of 17.5 cantons on 28

November 2010. Finally, one of the SVP's most significant achievements was its 2014 Swiss immigration initiative. This popular initiative aimed to reduce immigration through maximum-ceiling quotas and to undermine the free movement of people and Switzerland's relationship with the EU. The initiative was accepted by 50.3 per cent of Swiss voters and a majority of 14.5 cantons on 9 February 2014. As McKeever (2020) argues, these three initiatives show how the SVP uses direct democracy to influence policymaking through extra-parliamentary channels on issues such as restricting immigration and opposing Islam and European integration.

Regarding SVP's electoral success compared with the other major Swiss political parties, the SVP has managed to grow since 1991 at the expense of the SP, CVP and FDP (see Figure 4.1). The two electoral troughs in 2011 and 2019 occurred as Swiss voters seemed to give their votes to the Green Party (GP). As argued by Dolezal (2016), this can be explained by the ongoing impacts of climate change and the electorate's support for parties dealing with such issues.

Figure 4.1 – Electoral vote share (in per cent) of the major Swiss political parties in the lower chamber of the Federal Assembly from 1971 to 2019
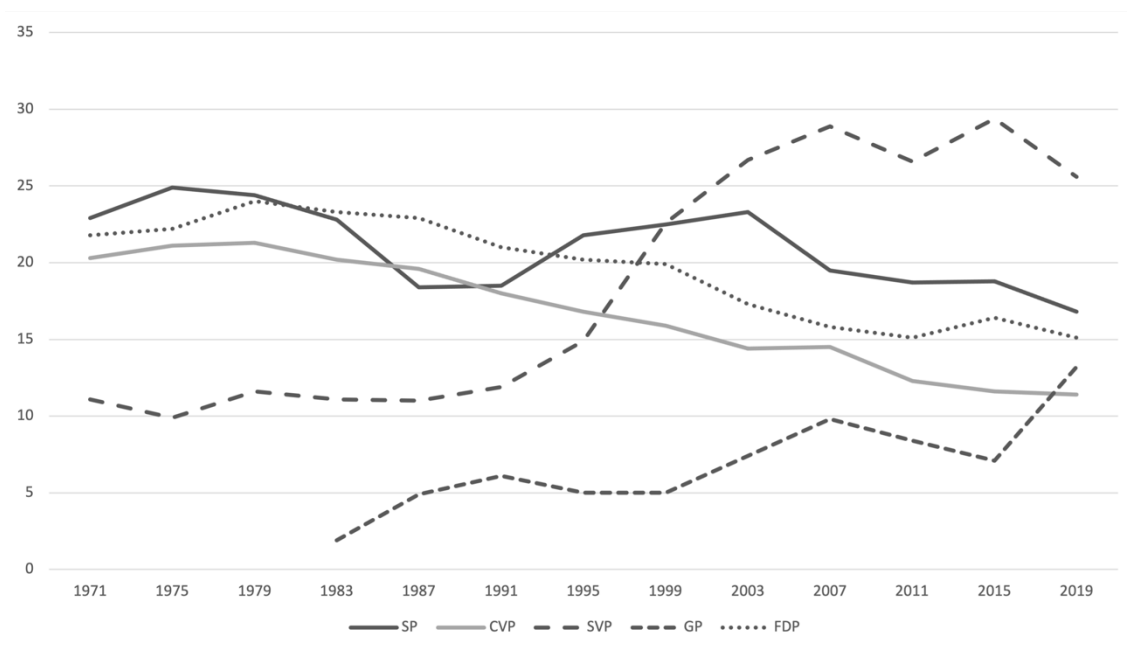
Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

Essentially, while the SVP underwent an ideological radicalisation during the 1990s, the party succeeded in consolidating its representation in Parliament and staying in the government coalition, contrary to other RWPPs in Western democracies. According to

Skenderovic and Mazzoleni (2007: 90), this can be explained by the historical role and capital of the SVP inside the Swiss political system, which relates to its origins: "The SVP was able to depend on its image as an institutional partner which accepts the rules of the game, and as a reliable, long-term companion which has consistently helped to build Switzerland's post-war consensual system."

To sum up, the radicalisation of the "new" SVP since the 1990s cannot be understood without considering 1) the implementation of a new ideology regarding issues like asylum, immigration and nationalism (i.e. identity politics), 2) the promotion of an anti-establishment political style with criticism of the establishment and the concordance system and 3) the use of direct-democratic tools such as popular initiatives and referenda (Mazzoleni 2008: 38). Furthermore, the strong figure of Christoph Blocher helped to grow the party from a weak and decentralised to an activist-intensive and capital-intensive national organisation (Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016). In this regard, the SVP was able to defend Swiss exceptionalism and national identity (neutrality, independence, federalism, direct democracy) against supranational integration, fight immigration and asylum, defend neoliberalism with a chauvinist vision of the welfare state and defend moral conservatism against criminality by reinforcing law and order (Mazzoleni 2008).

The Geneva, Basel-Country and Basel-City SVP cantonal branches

As stated above, although there has been a process to centralise the party at the national level, the sub-state cantonal branches still enjoy significant autonomy, for instance, regarding the representation of the party's interests at the regional level. Among others, the cantonal branches can adopt stances that differ from the national party and are responsible for the selection of candidates for cantonal and federal elections, the recruitment of new members and the implementation of cantonal party manifestos (Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016). Mueller and Bernauer (2018) used Swiss political parties as case studies to explore the decentralisation of policy-seeking in Switzerland. They showed the importance of sub-state cantonal parties' branches responding to and prioritising contextual conflicts and patterns based on structural, ideological and strategic elements derived from their political habitat. This is done according to party territoriality in multi-level political systems. Similarly, Giger, Müller and Debus (2011) explored the cantonal party programs of Swiss

political parties and showed that sub-state cantonal parties' branches competing in decentralised federal democracies like Switzerland have to adapt to their sub-state constituencies. They do so by addressing cantonal conflicts and patterns to be electorally successful when considering regional socio-structural properties.

Considering this adaptation to sub-state constituencies, it is essential to emphasise that the discursive outcomes of sub-state RWPPs can have a material impact on, for instance, policy influence in sub-state parliaments. Even when parties are in opposition, they can use levers like motions, postulates, interpellations, questions and parliamentary initiatives to promote and gain support for their ideological agendas.[15] Sub-state parties can also use referenda and initiatives at the cantonal level to influence policymaking.

This section aims to examine the ideological and electoral features of the SVP's sub-state cantonal branches of Geneva, Basel-Country and Basel-City, as well as the material impact of their discourses on their respective sub-state cantonal constituencies.

The Geneva SVP was created in 1987 and won its first seats in the Geneva cantonal parliament and the lower house of the Federal Parliament in 2001 and 2003, respectively. With respect to its cantonal party manifesto, the Geneva SVP focuses on making immigration controls stricter and prioritising local employment to boost cantonal sovereignty (Storz 2019: 138). Regarding the party's electoral strength and as presented in Figure 4.2, while the FDP was always a strong party on the Genevan landscape, the SVP has rather been weak compared with the other political forces. The Geneva SVP has traditionally been one of the weakest political forces in the Genevan parliament, except in 2013, when it overtook the GP with 10.3 per cent of the vote, and in 2023, when it overtook the CVP with 10.7 per cent of the vote. According to Kriesi et al. (2005: 214), the weakness of the Geneva SVP may be explained by the fact that the canton of Geneva is highly international and very open to globalisation, which is why this branch of the SVP has not succeeded in securing a greater share of the votes.

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[15] A motion instructs the executive government to draw up a legislative act or decree, take a measure or present a report to the legislative power on a given matter. A postulate instructs the executive government to examine whether a legislative act or decree should be drawn up, a measure taken or a report written. An interpellation instructs the executive government to provide written information on any matter relating to the canton. A question must be short and instructs the executive government to provide written information within a short period of time on any matter relating to the canton. Finally, a parliamentary initiative allows for the submission of a legislative act or decree to the legislative power.

When considering the party's influence on policy, the Geneva SVP embodies an oppositional party in the cantonal political landscape. However, the Geneva SVP regularly pursues cantonal initiatives on various themes developed around their political agenda. In January 2018, the party aimed to undertake a cantonal initiative on cross-border workers entitled "Genève d'abord". This initiative sought to introduce cantonal preference regarding the employment of Genevan people instead of foreign workers based on equity matters. However, in May 2018, the party announced that it was withdrawing its initiative and switched to supporting the one launched by the MCG entitled "Frontaliers: stop!", which focused on similar issues. The initiative required employers to prove unsuccessful findings of a Genevan worker before hiring a cross-border one.

Furthermore, the Geneva SVP regularly launch motions, interpellations or parliamentary initiatives at the cantonal parliament. In February 2023, for example, the Geneva SVP asked the cantonal government for a moratorium on hiring cross-border workers to only hire Genevan people.

Figure 4.2 – Electoral vote share (in per cent) of the major Swiss political parties in the cantonal parliament of Geneva from 1987 to 2023
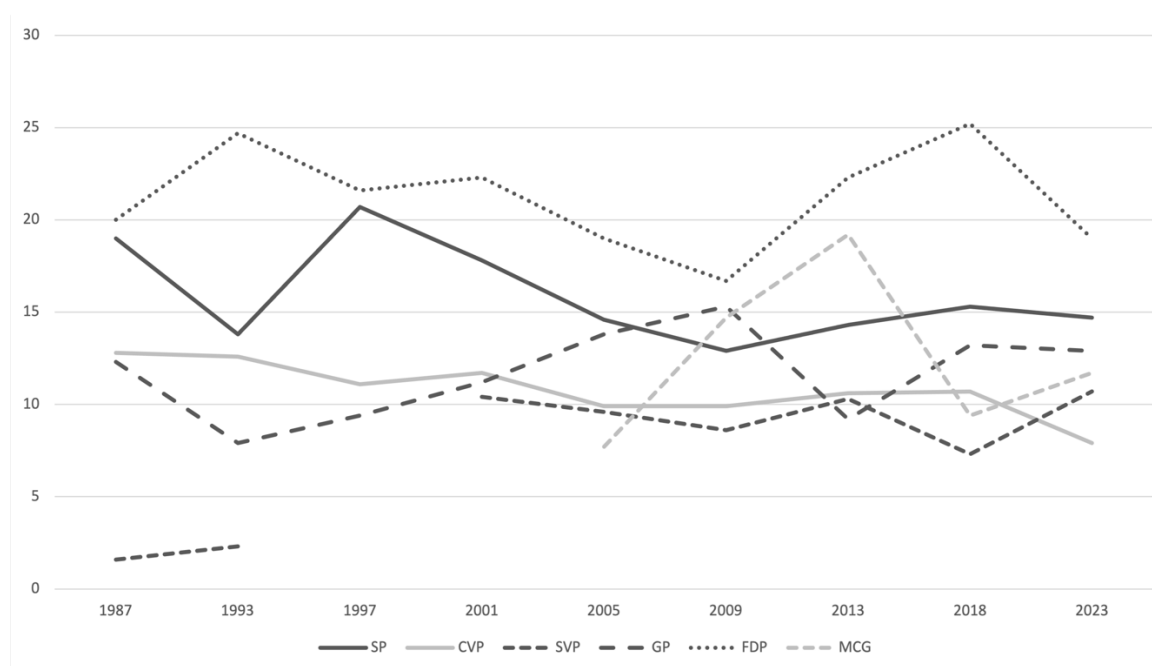
Source: Cantonal Statistical Office Geneva

The Basel-Country SVP was founded in 1971 and was historically embedded in a long-standing agrarian legacy, as the BGB was already operating in the canton. The party won

its first seats in the cantonal parliament in the same year. As shown in Figure 4.3, the Basel-Country SVP seemed to make a breakthrough in 1995. It became the second-most powerful party in the cantonal parliament in the 2003 and 2007 cantonal elections at the expense of the FDP and CVP. The Basel-Country SVP became the strongest party during the 2011 and 2015 cantonal elections at the expense of all other political parties. In the cantonal elections in 2019, the party returned as the second-most powerful party (22.7 per cent of the electoral vote share) as the SP beat it by a narrow margin, scoring 22.8 per cent. In 2023, the party became the strongest once again, with 22 per cent of the electoral vote share, at the expense of the SP and the GP. Regarding its ideological profile, the Basel-Country SVP has strongly supported the national SVP's manifesto since 2011 (Storz 2019: 417).

When considering the policy influence of the Basel-Country SVP, and in contrast to the sub-state cantonal branches of the Geneva and Basel-City SVP, the party did have a representative within the cantonal government during the past decade: Thomas Weber, from the 2013 complementary cantonal elections until 2023. However, this did not have a significant impact on cross-border issues. For instance, the SVP in the legislative government still used levers to constrain government, such as on cross-border issues. An illustrative example is the launch of a postulate by the SVP's Patrick Schäfli in March 2015 regarding the taxation of cross-border workers. Schäfli asked for the creation of a legal basis to deduct taxes directly from the salary of cross-border workers. Contrary to the Geneva case, the SVP in Basel-Country never launched any cantonal referendum or initiative aimed at protecting job positions for Basel residents against cross-border workers.

Figure 4.3 – Electoral vote share (in per cent) of the major Swiss political parties in the cantonal parliament of Basel-Country from 1971 to 2023
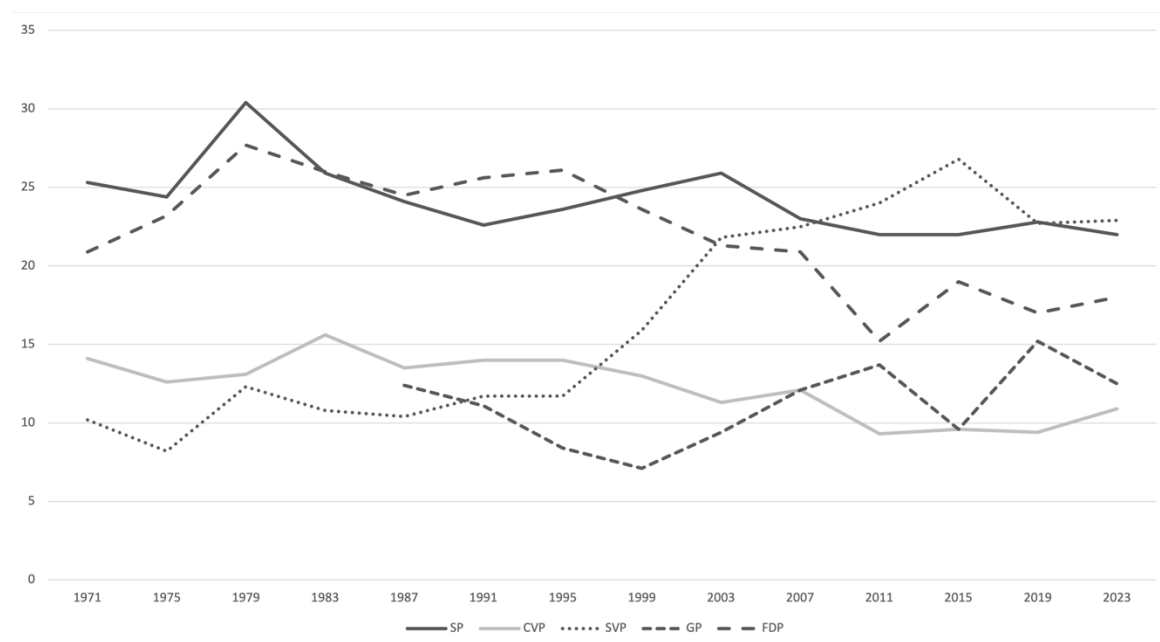
Source: Cantonal Statistical Office Basel-Country

Unlike the Basel-Country SVP, the Basel-City SVP is more recent: It was founded in 1991 following the national process of the SVP's radicalisation and won its first seats in the cantonal parliament in 1992. According to Figure 4.4, while the SP has more or less remained the primary political force on the Basel-City landscape, the SVP became the second-most powerful party from 2004 to 2016. However, during the last cantonal elections in 2020, the party lost its electoral vote share (11 per cent) at the expense of the GP (16.6 per cent). Regarding its ideological profile, the Basel-City SVP is considered relatively moderate (Storz 2019: 158).

When considering the party's influence on policy, and to the same extent as the Genevan case, although it is one of the strongest political forces in the cantonal political landscape, the Basel SVP is an oppositional party as it does not have an MP in the cantonal executive. Furthermore, like the Basel-Country SVP, the Basel-City SVP never launched any cantonal referendum or initiative targeting cross-border issues. Instead, the party has focused more on security issues, among others, with a cantonal initiative entitled "Für einen sicheren Kanton Basel-Stadt" (For a safer Basel-City canton) that aimed to increase police presence in public spaces. However, this initiative was rejected by 63.1 per cent of the voters in 2012.

Figure 4.4 – Electoral vote share (in per cent) of the major Swiss political parties in the cantonal parliament of Basel-City from 1992 to 2020
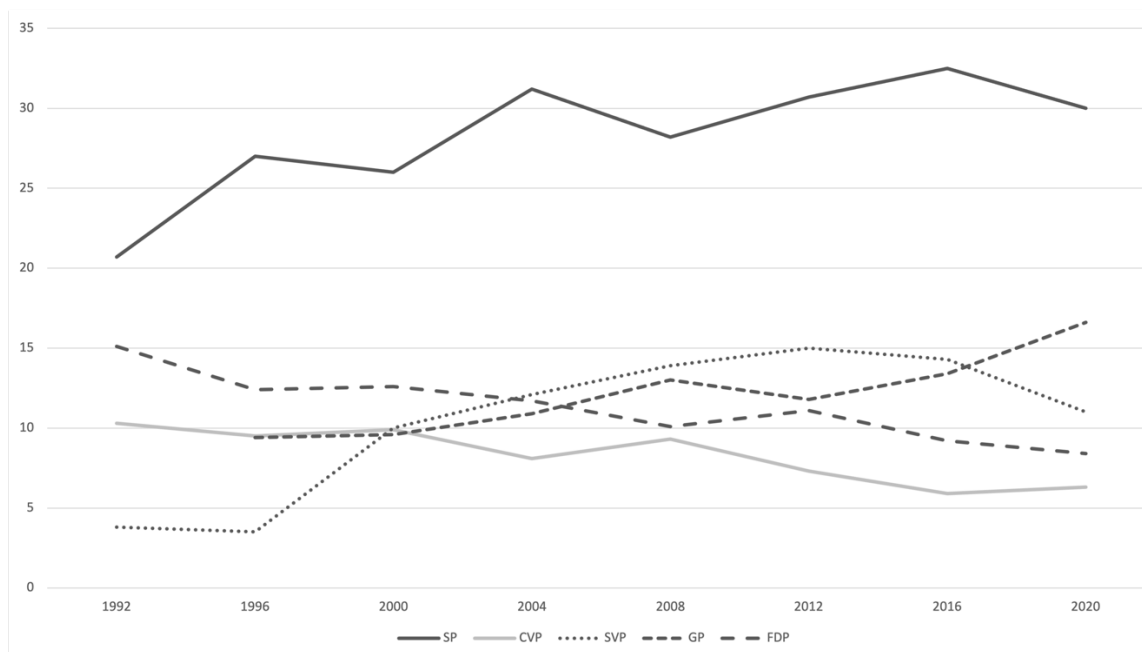
Source: Cantonal Statistical Office Basel-City

Finally, when considering the cantonal party manifestos, and unlike the Geneva SVP, the Basel-City and Basel-Country branches of the SVP do not have their own party manifestos but rely on the national one (for more on this topic, see Chapter 7).

The Geneva Citizens' Movement (MCG)

The Geneva Citizens' Movement (Mouvement Citoyens Genevois, MCG) is a regionalist party in the Swiss canton of Geneva. The party was founded in 2005 by two former members of the Geneva SVP (Georges Letellier and Eric Stauffer) and focuses mainly on cross-border issues. Its slogan, "Geneva and Genevans first", summarises its position on cross-border immigration, especially from France. According to Bernhard (2017) and Béguin (2007), the MCG's entry into the Genevan political arena during the 2005 cantonal elections resonated with Genevan voters thanks to a political agenda that aimed to get rid of cross-border workers, the political establishment and criminals. By using the idea to clean up the Genevan landscape, the MCG succeeded in gaining 7.7 per cent of the electoral vote share and nine of the 100 seats in the cantonal parliament.

Thus, for the MCG's ideological profile, French cross-border workers are regarded as the leading cause of the canton's problems, such as unemployment, violence and insecurity, and the party aimed to restrict cross-border workers' access to the canton of Geneva by enhancing border controls (Herzog and Sohn 2014: 458). Within this framework, the party claims to defend the Genevan and Swiss people against cross-border and European workers and fight for a financial increase of the family allowance and a financial decrease of health insurance for Genevan people (Storz 2019: 138). In this context, regarding the material impact of the MCG, the party launched multiple referenda to protect local employment and, thus, influence cantonal policymaking (Bernhard 2020). For instance, one of the party's main successes on cross-border issues was the launch, in 2014, of a cantonal referendum to reject the co-financing of Parks and Ride (P+R) construction in neighbouring France. Initially, this project aimed to facilitate the movement of cross-border workers. The referendum, which refused co-financing, was approved by 51.1 per cent of Genevan voters. The MCG launched a cantonal initiative in January 2023 aimed at prohibiting the hiring of cross-border workers for sensitive job positions in the cantonal public administration.

Furthermore, the MCG had a representative in the cantonal government from 2013 to 2023, which presented the party with a significant opportunity to influence policymaking, in contrast to the case of Basel-Country: Mauro Poggia oversaw the employment department from 2013 to 2018 and significantly contributed to implementing cantonal preference in cantonal law. In 2014, an agreement was signed between the Cantonal Employment Office and the Federation of Entrepreneurs to require Genevan employers to announce vacant position to the Cantonal Employment Office, which could then recommend up to five unemployed Genevan candidates within five days. This process applied to the cantonal administration, the Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), Geneva Airport and the Geneva Public Transports (TPG). In 2020, the agreement was expanded to the private sector, and private firms have the option to voluntarily sign the convention and implement cantonal preference. As argued by Durand, Decoville and Knippschild (2020), one material impact of this public policy measure has been an increase in the perception of French cross-border workers as unwanted.

Figure 4.2 shows that the MCG has had a remarkable impact on the Genevan political landscape since the 2009 cantonal elections and even became the second-most influential political party behind the FDP in 2013. As such, the party's ideological programme echoed the Genevan voters' resentment. Similar to what happened during the 2005 cantonal

elections, the tensions on the local labour market resulting from the opening of borders and the high unemployment rate in Geneva in comparison with the Swiss average were strongly emphasised by the party, and cross-border workers were depicted as profiteers (Herzog and Sohn 2014: 459). Furthermore, the housing and mobility crises and the increasing insecurity experienced by the Genevan people have spurred support for the party at the ballot box since the 2011 municipal elections (Delaugerre 2012: 244). However, in 2018, the party suffered a stunning defeat, with a total vote share of 9.4 per cent, losing ground to the SP and the GP. This regression may be attributed to the emergence of a new party, Geneva on the Move (Genève en Marche, GeM), led by the former founder of the MCG, Eric Stauffer. Stauffer is still considered an influential and charismatic figure within the MCG (Bernhard 2017), and his new party posed a significant challenge. This split put the internal divisions of the MCG under the microscope. In 2023, although the party had managed to increase its electoral vote share to a total of 11.7 per cent, it remained the fourth-largest party in the legislative parliament. As in 2018, this could be explained by the fact that cantonal preference, one of the MCG's flagship issues since its founding, has become a mainstream issue for all political parties.

4.2. Understanding the French Political and Party Systems

France's current political system is better known as the Fifth Republic, whose institutionalisation can be traced back to 1958 through a constitutional reform initiated by Charles de Gaulle. In this context, the French political system embodies a semi-presidential system with presidential primacy, meaning that the president is the head of state and acts as a crisis manager, the nation's chief policymaker and its first politician (François 2011). The political system is divided up between executive and legislative powers. The president is the head of the executive and elected via universal suffrage through a two-ballot majoritarian system (i.e. a two-round system) for a five-year term, known in French as a *quinquennat*. Since 2000, the presidential (executive) and parliamentary (legislative) elections have been synchronised, meaning that legislative elections take place five weeks after their presidential counterpart. According to Stevens (2003), both of these are considered first-order elections because they bring about substantial changes in central

government and the running of policymaking. In addition, according to Epstein and Pinson (2021) and Siaroff (2013), the French political system can be considered highly centralised.

On the one hand, executive power (i.e. the government) is shared between the president and the prime and other ministers and, thus, represents a two-headed executive political system. As explained by Knapp and Wright (2006), the president's role is to ensure the proper functioning of the public authorities and the continuity of the State by guarantying France's national independence, territorial integrity and the observance of treaties. At the beginning of his presidency, the president can choose a prime minister (provided his party has a parliamentary majority, as explained below), dissolve the National Assembly (i.e. the lower chamber of the parliament), call parliamentary elections (not more than once a year), call a referendum regarding the organisation of public authorities or the ratification of a treaty (with the agreement of the government) and take emergency powers during crises. Besides the president, the prime minister is considered the leader of government operations and acts as president of the Council of Ministers. As such, he is responsible for directing the government's operations and determining and conducting national policy. However, while the president can ask Parliament to reconsider a law (as he has no legislative veto right), the prime minister must consent to it with his signature. Being responsible to the National Assembly, the prime minister must command a majority to ensure the ability to fend off a censure motion by the opposition. Accordingly, if the president has a friendly parliamentary majority, he can choose a prime minister from his own political camp, but if he has a hostile parliamentary majority, he must appoint a prime minister acceptable to that majority (François 2011). Thus, if the president can appoint a prime minister who shares his views, he is the master of both the internal and external politics and policies of the country.[16] At the same time, if he faces a hostile parliament majority, he loses the freedom to control domestic policies and must ensure cohabitation with the prime minister's parliamentary majority.[17] The other ministers are appointed by the president upon the prime minister's recommendation and are in charge of the different public administrative departments with

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[16] This is better known as the *fait majoritaire*, meaning that if the parliament majority is friendly to the president (i.e. if it consists of a stable majority in the National Assembly), the government has control over legislation and how the government is held to account by Parliament (Knapp and Wright 2006: 153).

[17] According to Knapp and Wright (2006: 121), "cohabitation arises from the leadership of the parliamentary majority passing from the president to the prime minister. For the president, this intensifies the characteristic ambiguity of his role, as the president of all the French who is also a party politician."

their own personal staff (better known as *cabinets*). As such, ministers hold considerable powers as policymakers in drafting their ministries' legislations.

On the other hand, legislative power (i.e. the parliament) is bicameral and composed of the National Assembly, which is directly elected by the French voters through a two-round ballot system every five years and represents the lower house of Parliament, and the Senate, which consists of indirectly elected MPs. These senators are elected by an electoral college of regional and local councillors for six years with a half-replacement every three years, and they represent the republic's different territorial communities by acting as the upper house of Parliament. Historically, the Senate has represented the rural notables who could be potential allies against an unruly National Assembly. However, while the Senate can refuse bills or propose amendments, the National Assembly has the power to override them, representing an unequal share of power between both parliamentary chambers. As Knapp and Wright (2006: 164) explain:

> The parliament, and more specifically the National Assembly, remains central for French politicians because it retains significant powers and high visibility. It is a significant transformer, and occasionally initiator, of laws. It defines at least some of the limits of what governments can do.

As such, the French political system can be labelled as rationalised parliamentarism: Even if the parliament has substantial rights, the government still control the parliamentary agenda and can refuse parliamentary amendments to their own bills, which can only be voted out by a censure motion carried by a majority of MPs in the National Assembly (Dulong 2010; François 2011). As such, while the government has this battery of provisions to reduce the parliament's powers, it still needs the goodwill of the National Assembly to survive. As argued by Haegel (2009: 222):

> The political system under the Fifth Republic is in reality a mixed or hybrid system to the extent that it combines two principles that which are generally considered to be antagonistic: the election of the president by universal suffrage and the power of the Parliament to overthrow the government. The hybrid character of the Fifth Republic forces the parties to establish a dual system of cooperation, both legislative and presidential.

According to François (2011: 39-41), Parliament's role is to determine the rules on a range of specific issues such as fundamental liberties, civil status and civil rights, liability to

taxation, conscription, penal procedures and electoral laws. Furthermore, Parliament formulates the general principles and framework of laws relating to local government, education, property rights, trade union law, social security and finance bills. By contrast, the implementation of such laws is left to the government. Any issue not precisely covered by the parliament's role is left to the discretion of the government, which may rule any parliamentary bill or amendment out of order according to articles 37 and 41 of the French constitution.

However, the government and the parliament are not the only political forces within the French political system. While the creation of the centralised nation-state with a uniform pattern of administration can be traced back to the French Revolution meant to counter the local diversity in legal and administrative customs thanks to a highly centralised administration, the sub-state levels of political and administrative structures of the government remain important (Frinault 2021). Owing to successive decentralisation reforms that initially took place in 1982 during the transformation of central–local relations regarding political decision-making processes, the sub-state levels of government (i.e. communes, departments and regions) have substantial rights in the management of local policies and administrative measures. The following paragraphs delve into the different configurations of sub-state levels of the political and administrative structures (see Stevens 2003: 141-150).

Firstly, the basic unit of a local organisation is the commune. The creation of communes (or municipalities) can be traced back to 1789 and is built on the parishes of the Old Regime. The commune represents the lowest level of state administration and the basic unit of local governance. Depending on their size, communes can act in the following areas: the maintenance of public health and safety, the development of local infrastructure and public transport, the furtherance of local economic development, the provision and maintenance of buildings for nursery and primary schools and the provision for certain cultural facilities. Furthermore, the communes have power over town and country planning for infrastructure developments and some responsibility for the construction and maintenance of local roads and paths, drainage and water supply, streetlights and local transport. The communes' local governments are represented by municipal councils, whose members are elected every six years through multiple non-transferable votes for communes with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants and a party-list proportional representation with a majority bonus system for communes with more than 1,000 inhabitants. It is important to note that the majority of

communes are now part of municipal partnerships, commonly known as "intercommunalities". These new political institutions are designed to manage urban regions around new local powers comprising elected politicians and teams of professionals, especially in the management of local public services and the development of local projects (see Frinault 2019; 2021).

Secondly, a higher unit of a sub-state political entity is the department. The creation of departments dates to 1790 and is based on the old dioceses. Today, the French territory is divided up into 100 departments (96 on mainland France and four overseas). Historically, the departments were devised by the central authority for administrative reasons. Since 1871, the departments have acted as units of local democracy with an elected council. One of the main scopes of departments is to formulate policies to tackle local problems. They remain essential for the organisation of central government activities. Most importantly, the departments are responsible for regulating social work, providing children's homes and homes for the elderly and fighting poverty and social exclusion by contributing to the fund for basic income support, preventive medicine and fire and rescue services. They are also in charge of constructing and maintaining most roads and bridges, equipping high schools and subsidising and assisting small and rural communes. Until 1983, the departments were administrative bodies rather than entities of genuine local government that could provide a forum for the communes' concerns. The departments' local governments are represented by general councils, whose members are elected every six years, and half are renewed every three years through a two-ballot majority system.

Thirdly, the highest political sub-state level is the region. The establishment of regions resulted from the wish to improve infrastructure development and economic restructuring by creating an intermediary level between the State and the departments. In 1982, the regions became autonomous with a directly elected local government, and the first regional elections took place in 1986. In 2015, under the presidency of François Hollande, the regions were restructured into mega-regions under a new law relating to the delimitation of regions, reducing their number from 22 to 13. This law aimed to create larger regions to enhance their strategic competencies in terms of planning and spatial organisation and to create more economically attractive regions (see Doré 2021). The power of regions is largely based on economic development and the non-staff costs of higher secondary schools. The regions can fund buildings and other facilities for universities and academic activities and cultural activities and are responsible for professional training, apprenticeship and

employment support for young people. The regions' governments are represented by regional councils, which act as consultants on economic, social and health issues. Until 2004, elections had been held through a proportional system. Since 2004, they have used a two-ballot majoritarian system with a high second-ballot threshold (meaning that the overall majority, either 50 per cent at the first ballot or the majority at the second, will be given 25 per cent of the seats, and the remaining 75 per cent will be divided up among the second-ballot lists with more than 3 per cent of the vote).

According to Knapp and Wright (2006: 381-382), while the 1982 and subsequent decentralisation reforms have redistributed powers between the central and sub-state political levels, the French political system has not turned to federalism, and the central powers remain primarily in the hands of the central government. Pasquier (2016: 293) maintains that "the history of regionalization in France bears the imprint of the centralising French republican tradition". At the same time, this has helped departments and regions to choose their own executives and to be more independent regarding regional and local issues, thus redesigning political powers within the Fifth Republic. However, contrary to the institutionalised decentralisation that can be observed in the Swiss political system, the French political system is still tinted by centralisation as the State has major influence (Epstein and Pinson 2021; Siaroff 2013). In line with Caramani (2004), the organisation of French politics and the structuring of the party system can be considered highly nationalised and centralised.

Regarding the French party system of the Fifth Republic and as argued by Stevens (2003: 199), "the party system of the Fifth Republic is a weak and fragmented system, made all the more confusing by the plethora of tiny groups which emerge at election time and whose raison d'être seems to be to harvest resources". Thus, the party system is fuelled by multipartyism and bipolarisation.

Firstly, according to Stevens (2003: 197) and Knapp and Wright (2006: 261), the party system can be understood through multipartyism for the following reasons: 1) There is a varied and conflictual ideological heritage of political parties, which makes cooperation and mergers rather unthinkable; 2) the presidential elections, considered as first-order elections, provide strong political capital for parties if one of its members attracts a large vote share; 3) the local power base is important in second-order elections as parties can develop strong local implementation and gain local seats; and 4) over the years, many new parties have emerged outside the major alliances within the French political party system. Furthermore,

as argued by Offerlé (2022: 87), the logic of the two-ballot majoritarian system has tended to favour a relatively stable multiparty system.

Despite being characterised by multipartyism, the French political party system was generally considered to be strongly bipolarised until 2017 (Offerlé 2022). This bipolarisation had arisen from both the institutional framework and the strategies developed by the parties and the candidates themselves. Regarding the institutional framework, according to Knapp and Wright (2006: 262-265), three main reasons support the phenomenon of bipolarisation: 1) the limiting of the two leading candidates on the second ballot of the presidential elections, 2) the elimination from the second ballots of all candidates who gained less than 12.5 per cent of the vote share during parliamentary elections and 3) having articles in the constitution that force members of the National Assembly into a majority–opposition divide (e.g. the right of the government to declare a bill a question of confidence, which may only be rejected by a censure motion through Article 49-3). This is also enhanced by the *fait majoritaire*, as the stable majorities in the National Assembly can sustain the government in office, and presidential elections when strong oppositional coalitions are formed (François 2011). Furthermore, as Cole (2003) indicates, this is precisely the cooperative strategies between the two mainstream blocs of the left and the right that have fostered the bipolarity of the party system. Against this backdrop, the French party system is characterised by the importance of building coalitions to stay in competition (Sauger 2007). According to Ivaldi (2018: 183), the two-ballot majoritarian system of most elections forces parties to build coalitions in order to ensure that they stay competitive in the second-ballot round; therefore, it is detrimental for smaller political competitors and easily provides mainstream parties with parliamentary majorities:

> The clustering of parties of the left and the right reflects the incentives generated by the double ballot system. Parties need tactical electoral pacts with smaller allies to enhance their competitiveness. Cooperation typically involves candidates dropping out between ballots in favour of the strongest first-round candidate.

Thus, weaker parties need to build alliances to obtain a substantial share of the vote. By relying on the cartel party theory of Katz and Mair (2018), which highlights the joint interests of strong mainstream parties to build a coalition in order to stay in power against newcomer and challenger parties, Dézé (2008) shows how the French political party system is fuelled by cartel mechanisms inside the two-bloc status quo.

Finally, the French party system is mainly geared towards the presidential election, as the president's power and tasks are far-reaching and the president is elected via universal suffrage (Haegel 2009). As argued by Pütz (2007: 322), this has led to the presidentialisation of politics in the French party system. There is a strong personification of leaders even if the candidacies remain strongly partisan, and the media's emphasis on leaders increases the focus on personalities, according to Stevens (2003: 224). Knapp and Wright (2006: 278) also underscore this personification with the notion of the personalisation of politics:

> This is encouraged by the personalisation of politics at all levels, from the presidency down. Personalisation offers plenty of scope for outbidding within each coalition and even each party, and favours, even more than other political systems, the presentation of politics as a contest for office between individuals rather than a confrontation of programmes, contributing further to the alienation of voters from the political process.

How have RWPPs like the National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN) managed to compete and gain visibility despite operating in an enclosed and restrictive party system designed to expel fringe parties and characterised by a bipolarised, two-ballot majoritarian system created by the cartelisation of dominant mainstream parties? Firstly, as Machin (1990) shows, the proportional system of the European and regional elections has fuelled RWPPs with protest votes from the electorate without concerning themselves with tactical votes in response to the two-ballot majoritarian system. As a result, and given the RN's major electoral success in such electoral arenas (see the next section), it is argued that the RN became a challenger party threatening mainstream dominant parties and altering the balance between the traditional two predominant blocs (Ivaldi 2018a). Furthermore, as argued by Meguid (2008), the depoliticisation of specific issues (e.g. relating to migration) by dominant mainstream parties has allowed the RN to increase its ownership of these concerns and other fears of ordinary citizens, thereby offering citizens a real alternative to the dominant mainstream parties in government (Bértoa and Enyedi 2021; Rispin 2021). Although the constraints of a two-ballot majoritarian system limit the RN's ability to gain parliamentary representation (Dézé 2008; Ivaldi 2003) and the dominant political parties' strategy of a cordon sanitaire by not considering coalitions with the RN (Delwit 2014a; Ivaldi 2018a), the party still managed to compete and gain visibility for the reasons mentioned above.

With respect to the material influence of the RN, it has always been an oppositional party in France and has never been in government. In this context, as the French political and

party systems do not provide the same political opportunities as in Switzerland (i.e. direct democracy tools, a proportional electoral system, the rule of concordance), it has been difficult for the RN to have a concrete and material impact on policymaking processes. However, as argued by Stockemer and Barisione (2017), the RN's right-wing populist discourse – especially its ideology and political solutions on issues such as national preference, immigration and security – has gradually influenced and attracted more and more voters who are disappointed with mainstream political parties.

Finally, one can argue that the political rise of the RN and its success in the most recent presidential and parliamentary elections (see next section) changed the party system configuration. Accordingly, as argued by Elgie (2018), it is possible to hypothesise a further fragmentation of the traditional bipolar party system to a three-pole system when considering the 2022 parliamentary elections and the power-sharing between the left coalition, the centre-right coalition and the radical right consisting of the RN. Furthermore, according to Bastow (2018), when taking into account the RN's form of national republicanism, which has become hegemonic in the recent decade, the party can now be considered part of the mainstream.

4.2.1. RWPP on the French Side: The Rise of the National Rally

The National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN) was founded in 1972 as the National Front (Front National, FN). Its creation resulted from a small neo-fascist organisation called "Ordre Nouveau". According to Millington (2019), "Ordre Nouveau" was formed in 1969 as an extreme right-wing group wishing to break into mainstream politics, destroy the democratic regime of the Fifth Republic by uniting the fascists and nationalists of the extreme right and appeal to conservatives disappointed by the presidency of Georges Pompidou. As explained by Albertini and Doucet (2013: 26-27), one of the flagship issues of this extreme right-wing group was anti-communism. Consequently, the RN was created and led by Jean-Marie Le Pen to extract the right-wing formation "Ordre Nouveau" from extra-institutional activism to prosper within the French electoral and political arena (Delwit 2014a).

When the party was created, its election platform for the 1973 legislative election focused on the fight against communism and the USSR, which was depicted as interfering in French

affairs (Albertini and Doucet 2013: 38). At the same time, the party's narrative focused on France experiencing an intellectual, moral and physical decline, the fight against immigration, pornography and drugs, political laxity and insecurity and the promotion of national and popular rights to save the country (Millington 2019: 133). The RN's results in these elections were weak, as the party only attracted 1.33 per cent of the vote on the national level.

After failing again in the 1974 presidential election, when the party's president, Jean-Marie Le Pen, drew only 0.74 per cent of the vote, the party's election platform experienced a reversal by concentrating essentially on the issue of immigration. Immigrants were depicted as contributing to the rise of the unemployment rate and threatening the French cultural and biological identity. According to Millington (2019: 138):

> The party's strategy aimed to ostracize the immigrant in political, cultural and economic, rather than racial, terms. FN candidates blamed foreigners for a growing sense of *insécurité*, a nebulous term that came to encompass concerns over crime, drugs, gang warfare, urban violence, civil disorder and the threat of civil war.

Consequently, the party focused on defending national preference and welfare chauvinism by promptly promising access to jobs, housing and social security to native French people and proposing to expel massive numbers of illegal migrants, restrict foreigners' rights and toughen the laws relating to citizenship and naturalisation (Crépon 2012). One of the party's first electoral messages regarding the linkage between unemployment and immigration was: "1 million unemployed, 1 million immigrants too many" (Dézé 2007: 272). The FN's racist and anti-immigrant ideology and the idea of "Frenchness" embodied a resurgence of an extreme-right ideology that stood in stark contrast to other political parties in the party system (Machin 1990; Meguid 2008).

This ideological re-orientation helped the party to win 9.65 per cent of the vote and 35 seats in the National Assembly during the 1986 parliamentary election,[18] which marked an unprecedented success for the party. At that time, liberal professionals, including traders

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[18] This electoral result was due to the exceptional use of the proportional electoral system in 1986 under the presidency of François Mitterrand. According to Ivaldi (2018: 179), "the Socialist government's introduction of a proportional system before the 1986 legislative elections has been criticized as an attempt to gain political advantage by weakening the UDF/RPR cartel. Conversely, the Chirac government's restoration of the majoritarian system two years later has been regarded as a move to deprive the FN of its newly acquired power and to re-establish Gaullist domination over the right."

and artisans, executive members and senior executives of small and mid-size companies, strongly supported the RN (Delwit 2014a: 189). However, owing to the return of the two-ballot majoritarian electoral system for the 1988 legislative election, the party lost its seats in the National Assembly and went on to win only a marginal number of seats after the late 1980s.

Delwit (2014a: 202) offers two explanations for the RN's difficulty in gaining seats in the National Assembly: Firstly, coalitions and alliances are incredibly important in this type of election because of the two-round majoritarian system. However, as the RN is generally not part of such coalitions because of the reluctance of the other political forces, it has been hard for the party to compete in the second-ballot round. Secondly, the legislative elections are based on winning at least 12.5 per cent of the vote in the first round to compete on the second ballot. As such, while the presidential election takes place before the legislative election, it is more difficult for parties to attract voters to participate in the latter. In addition, the determination of most of the mainstream parties to refuse coalitions and cooperation with the RN has turned the party into a pariah at the national political level (Ivaldi 2018a).

While it has always been hard for the RN to gain seats in the National Assembly (except during the 1986 election), the recent results of the 2017 and 2022 legislative elections were seen as a remarkable return for the party, as it won 8 and 89 seats, respectively, in Parliament (see Figure 4.5). Following its success in the 2022 legislative election, the RN was the main opposition party in the National Assembly. As argued by Martin (2022b), such a result for the RN could be explained by the increasing loyalty of its electorate, the dissatisfaction of rural and small towns with the president and his majority (through protest votes for anti-system parties against the government) and the *dédiabolisation* process led by Marine Le Pen (see below). Furthermore, this clearly shows that the RN has turned from a niche into a mainstream party and is continuing its establishment in the French party system (Bastow 2018; Meguid 2008).

Figure 4.5 – Number of seats for the RN in the National Assembly from 1973 to 2022
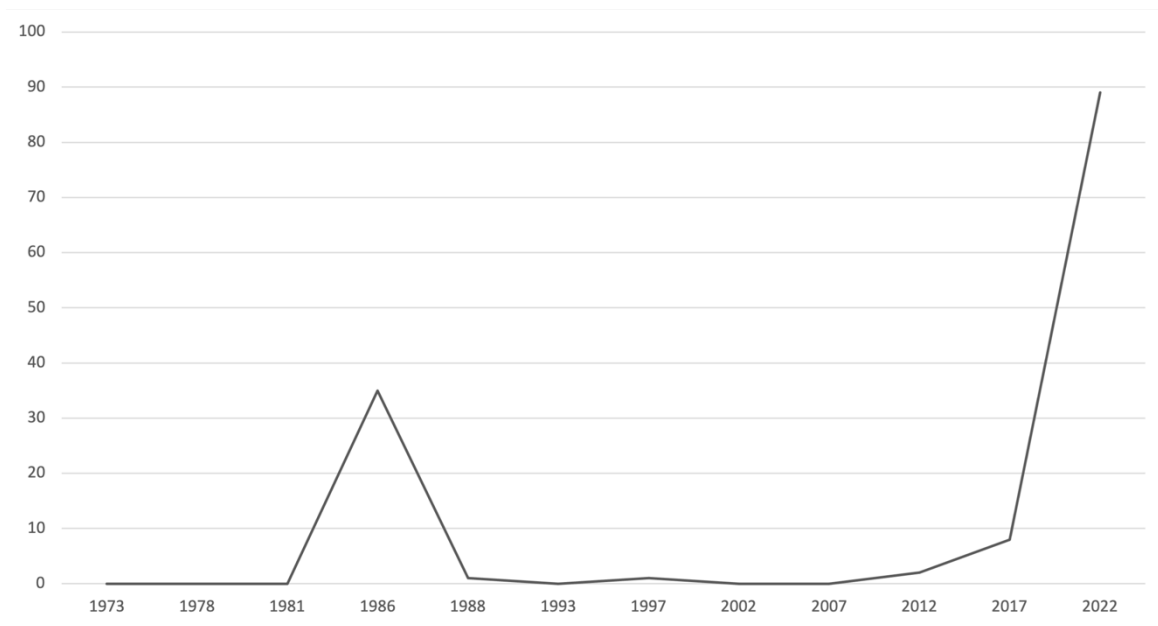
Source: Plateforme ouverte des données publiques françaises (data.gouv.fr)

In the 1988 presidential election, Jean-Marie Le Pen won 14.4 per cent of the vote, which was the best showing by an extreme right-wing candidate in the history of France's presidential elections up to that point. As shown by Ivaldi and Lanzone (2016: 132), the RN has been polling an average of 15 per cent in the presidential elections since the mid-1980s, which can be considered electoral stability (see Table 4.2). The 2002 presidential election marked a major moment in the RN's history, as Jean-Marie Le Pen beat Socialist Party candidate Lionel Jospin on the first ballot and became the first extreme right-wing candidate ever to run on the second ballot of the French presidential election, although he ended up losing to Jacques Chirac by a significant margin (Wodak 2021b: 275). In 2017, Marine Le Pen, who is the daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen and the current president of the RN, ran on the second ballot of the presidential elections against Emmanuel Marcon and lost while securing 33.9 per cent of the vote. A very similar scenario played out during the 2022 presidential election when Marine Le Pen lost on the second ballot against Emmanuel Macron, this time getting 41.5 per cent of the vote. As argued by Martin (2022a), the electoral breakthrough of Marine Le Pen is mainly due to the party expanding its electorate outside the big cities, especially among the working class in former industrial zones.

Table 4.2 – The RN's electoral vote share during presidential and European elections from 1974 to 2022

	Presidential elections (first-round votes)	European elections
1974	0.74% (Jean-Marie Le Pen)	
1984		11%
1988	14.4% (Jean-Marie Le Pen)	
1989		11.7%
1994		10.5%
1995	15% (Jean-Marie Le Pen)	
1999		5.7%
2002	16.9% (Jean-Marie Le Pen)	
2004		9.8%
2007	10.4% (Jean-Marie Le Pen)	
2009		6.3%
2012	17.9% (Marine Le Pen)	
2014		24.9%
2017	21.3% (Marine Le Pen)	
2019		23.3%
2022	23.2% (Marine Le Pen)	

Source: Plateforme ouverte des données publiques françaises (data.gouv.fr)

The RN made its national breakthrough during the 1984 European elections by winning 11 per cent of the vote. The specificity of the proportional electoral system for the European elections has always favoured the RN to gain seats in the European Parliament. During the 2014 elections, the RN received its best score against the other political parties by getting 24.9 per cent of the vote (Crépon, Dézé and Mayer 2015: 13). During the 2019 elections, the RN was still the major force in the European elections and receive 23.3 per cent of the vote (see Figure 4.6). As argued by Kelbel (2019), the recent breakthrough of the party as the major political force in the European elections has been favoured by the mobilisation of a nationalist electorate voting against the consolidation of European integration.

Figure 4.6 – RN electoral vote share (in per cent) compared with other political forces during the European elections from 1984 to 2019
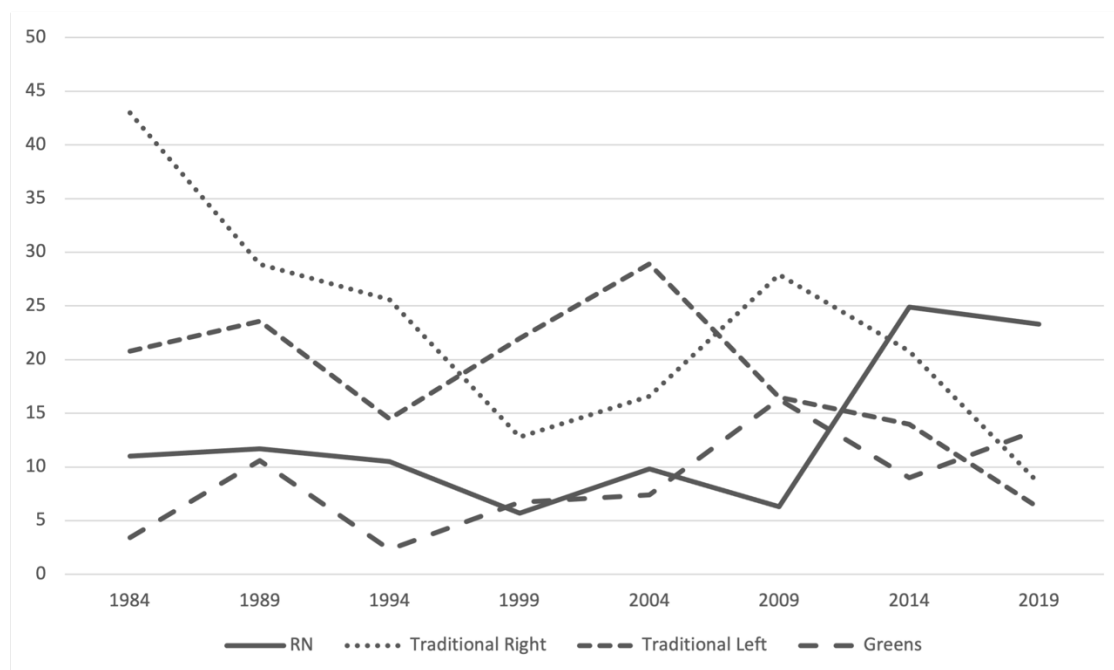
The RN has an ethno-nationalist and xenophobic political agenda combined with anti-establishment populism. It opposes minority rights, social equality and multiculturalism by emphasising social and public security, authoritarianism, anti-egalitarianism and national sovereignty issues (Stockemer 2017: 28). As argued by Dézé (2007: 263), the RN's ideology is based on the following five pillars: 1) a form of nationalism centred on preserving the French nation, 2) a form of neo-racism based on differentialism, 3) a national preference regarding welfare rights, 4) the promotion of a strong central State providing enough security, law and order and 5) an anti-establishment rhetoric that rejects the fundamental basis of French politics. As such, the main concerns of the RN are the preservation of French heritage, racial differentiation, anti-immigration, anti-globalisation, Euroscepticism and the fear of otherness (Ivaldi 2018b; Stockemer and Barisione 2017; Wodak 2021b). By focusing on immigration and law-and-order issues, the RN's rhetoric aims to underline that "French society is tainted by foreign influences and lax governmental public security policies and oppressed by the dictates of European integration and economic globalization" (Stockemer 2017: 27). In this sense, the discourse is firmly against globalisation and immigration and makes an appeal to people who feel threatened by economic modernisation (Stevens 2003: 222).

When Marine Le Pen replaced her father as president of the party in 2011, the electoral program did not radically change (Crépon, Dézé, and Mayer 2015a); issues such as immigration, anti-Europeanism, welfare chauvinism, public security and national identity were still on the agenda. In fact, as argued by Stockemer (2017: 32), the RN's ideological programme became even more severe regarding immigrants and restrictive measures in social, economic and security fields. In this vein, Marine Le Pen presented herself as the true saviour and representative of the popular will and the common French people by moving towards a form of catch-all populism (Surel 2019). She presented the RN as the true real alternative to mainstream politics by emphasising the dangers of insecurity, recession and Europeanisation (Stevens 2003: 220). However, her election as leader was considered an occasion to modernise the party and to move away from a purely anti-establishment stance (Delwit 2014b: 31). It presented her with an opportunity "to detoxify the party's reputation while simultaneously preserving its radical right-wing populist potential for vote mobilization" (Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016: 143). This detoxification (i.e., *dédiabolisation*) especially aimed to shed the party's extreme-right profile and achieve more credibility (Igounet 2014). Consequently, Marine Le Pen led such a strategy of *dédiabolisation* by presenting herself as "the new face of the radical right – a face that is more feminine and more republican, and that abstains from making overtly racist comments" (Stockemer 2017: 27). She downplayed the fascist, antisemitic and far-right party's ideology that her father had pushed under his leadership, which she did by moderating her discourse and presenting the RN as a mainstream right-wing party in order to broaden her electorate and remove the curse of racism (Ivaldi 2012; Wodak 2021b). According to Dézé (2015: 50), the *dédiabolisation* process also aims to normalise the extreme right-wing ideology relating to the dangers caused by immigration.

The ideological changes under the leadership of Marine Le Pen are exemplified by the stronger emphasis on promoting a solid central State and powerful national sovereignty in the face of supranational organisations. The following issues have all been strongly articulated in the rhetoric of Marine Le Pen: environmental protectionism, the relocalisation of production and businesses, welfare chauvinism, immigration as the cause of the drop in wages and social rights of French workers, the increase of communitarianism, the prioritisation of job, social housing and social rights for the French nationals and the fight against Islam from a secular perspective, as well as a traditional stance on family issues (e.g. same-sex marriage and homosexuality) (Delwit 2014a: 196-198). As such, and as argued

by Dézé (2015: 45-47), while Marine Le Pen has focused on issues like secularism, social issues and national priority, the ideological programme of the RN has remained relatively unchanged and is not radically different than the party's doctrinal agenda under Jean-Marie Le Pen. The *dédiabolisation* process that she undertook to create a better image of the party only concerns issues relating to Holocaust denial, neo-Nazism and antisemitism, which she has scrapped from her rhetoric. Another stage of the *dédiabolisation* was changing the party's name from the National Front (Front National, FN) to the National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN) in 2018.

Regarding the party's organisation, Ivaldi and Lanzone (2016: 132) point out that the RN "conforms to the model of a charismatic party, characterized by its centralisation of power, authoritarian leadership, and lack of intra-party democracy". In the 1990s, the party strengthened its party apparatus by building an effective nationwide organisation and developing its local power base. The implementation of executive and representative bodies and local federations in all 96 departments on the mainland allowed the RN to develop its national organisation through a strong centralised power system (i.e. through the party's executive bureau headed by the party's president) regarding the definition of policies and party strategies (Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016; Knapp and Wright 2006). As such, the party's centralisation was built around the charismatic figure of Jean-Marie Le Pen with his flamboyant personality and authoritarian form of political leadership (Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016; Stevens 2003). Jean-Marie Le Pen's financial contribution to the party's early development helped him to reinforce his position of power. After Marine Le Pen rose to the presidency in 2011, the changing party status remained anchored thanks to the strong centralisation of power, and the party's presidency continues to represent the node of all political decisions (Delwit 2014a: 198). Finally, while the development of party programmes and policies results from the centralised decision-making body and is firmly articulated around national interests, the RN still tries to adapt to territorialised opportunities and the specificities of the regions in order to address regional concerns and compete in the French multi-level political arena (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018).

The RN in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Grand Est Regions

When considering sub-state elections, the regional elections are considered the most important for the RN (Delwit 2014a; Knapp and Wright 2006). Regional elections operated on a proportional electoral system until 2003, which allowed the RN to gain representation on many regional councils and build alliances with other political parties because of its electoral strength (Delwit 2012: 129). Ivaldi (2018a: 187) asserts that, despite the other political parties' cordon sanitaire strategy vis-à-vis the RN at the national level, the traditional right was "unable to prevent local alliances, confirming the endurance of well-entrenched and self-sufficient local notables who often hold multiple offices and operate independently from national parties". Since 2004, the regional elections have a two-ballot majoritarian system with a high second-ballot threshold, meaning that the overall majority – either 50 per cent on the first ballot or the majority on the second – is attributed to 25 per cent of the seats, while the remaining 75 per cent is divided up among the second-ballot lists as long as they secure more than 3 per cent of the vote. Dézé (2008) writes that this reform sought to downplay protest parties and consolidate stable majorities at the regional level.

The Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Grand Est regions are particularly important for the RN's electoral results over time (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8). The RN won 19 per cent of the vote and 35 seats in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, and 20.6 per cent of the vote and 13 seats in Grand Est during the 1998 regional elections. According to Delwit (2012: 129), while the two-round system has returned, the RN was a stronger political force in these regions than other political parties in the 2004 and 2010 elections. This electoral trend was confirmed in 2015 and 2021, as the RN remained a substantial political force in these two strategic regions.

Figure 4.7 – RN seats on the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes regional council from 1986 to 2021
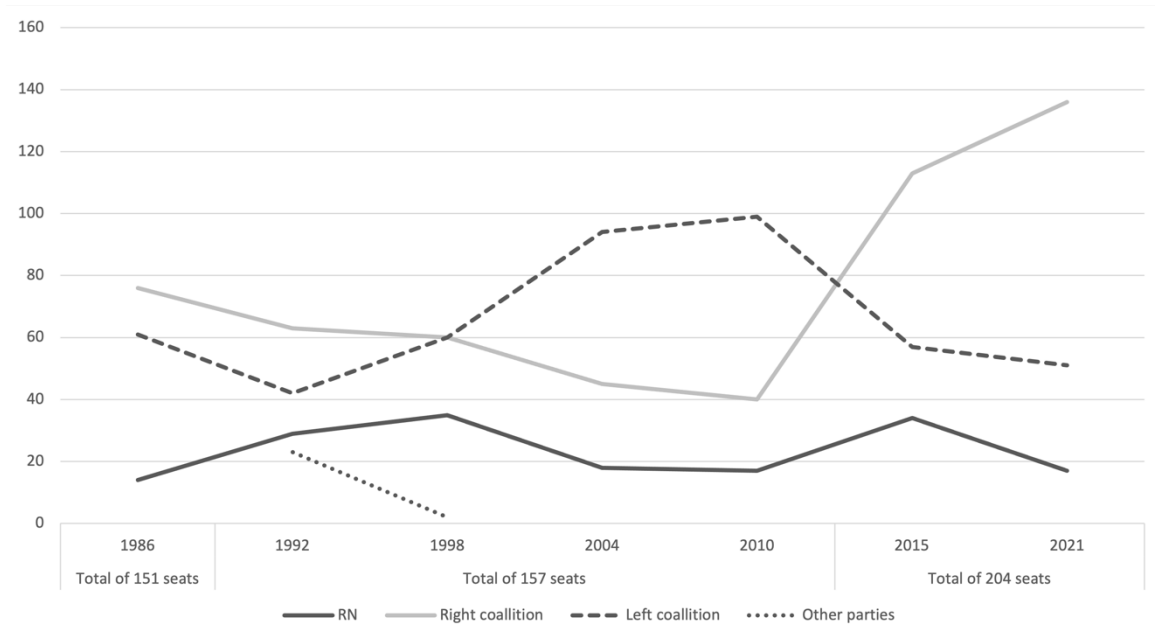
Source: Plateforme ouverte des données publiques françaises (data.gouv.fr)

Figure 4.8 – RN seats on the Grand Est regional council from 1986 to 2021
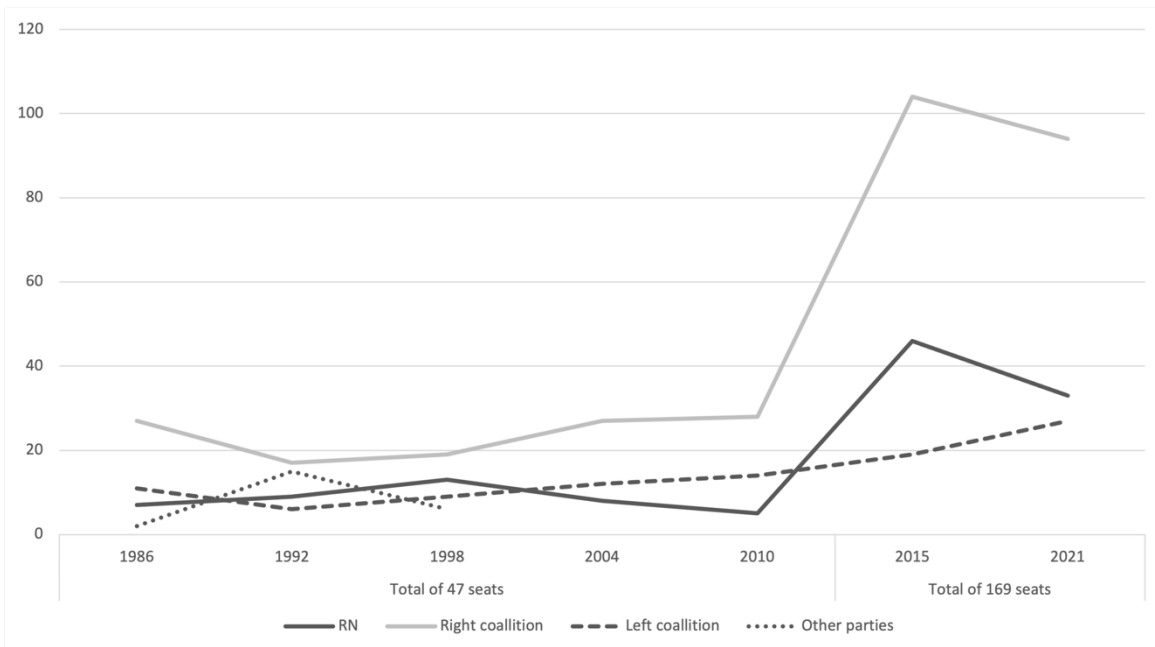
Source: Plateforme ouverte des données publiques françaises (data.gouv.fr)

4.3. Understanding the Institutional, Functional and Structural Dynamics of the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel Cross-Border Regions

As argued in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), borders can be considered multi-scalar social constructs and discursive landscapes (among others, see Casaglia 2020; Laine 2016; Perrier Bruslé 2013; Popescu 2012; Sohn 2018). Thus, cross-border regions (CBRs) are singular spaces that are constantly under construction and where the meanings of borders are continually being (re)negotiated. In this context, borders become laboratories defined by the practices of various actors such as local and regional communities, political entrepreneurs, transborder networks or institutions and global economic players (Herzog and Sohn 2014; Saint-Ouen 2012). The varying levels of socio-economic development drive cross-border regions as fertile grounds in exacerbating the tensions between the people who benefit from European integration against those who don't, and RWPPs are typical political actors trying to (re)configure borders as tools to delimit, distinguish and eject people from their territories (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020: 600-603).

The European Union's growth over the past 50 years has crystallised cross-border developments through the INTERREG programme, especially since 1975, to stimulate the functional integration of cross-border areas and cooperation between actors from different countries regarding spatial planning and economic development (Gumy, Drevon, and Kaufmann 2022; Sassano 2020; Sohn 2018). While the Swiss cantons of Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country – which are part of the cross-border regions of Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel – are not part of the European Union, their cross-border cooperation strategies have not been limited: On the contrary, the 1999 and 2004 bilateral agreements signed between Switzerland and the European Union allowed these Swiss cantons to successfully capitalise on and develop cross-border cooperation projects over time at an interregional scale (Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009: 934-936).

The Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs are significant spaces to explore the unfolding of right-wing populist bordering discourses. They represent some of the most important European CBRs in terms of cross-border flows, including the absolute number of cross-border workers, their number in relation to the cantons' population and their share of

employment (see Table 4.3). As such, these CBRs are considered among the most integrated within the European landscape when considering the strong cross-border employment dynamic and the advanced forms of cooperation within the fields of urban planning, transport and economic developments and cross-border infrastructures (Decoville et al. 2013; Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Delaugerre 2012; Sohn 2020). The Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs are interesting to consider as they share a strong functional integration and are among the regions with the highest cross-border labour movement rates in Europe (Herzog and Sohn 2014; Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009: 923). Both CBRs face large-scale integration that goes beyond national borders *per se* and is pro-actively establishing new cross-border labour pools. As such, the cities of Geneva and Basel offer plenty of knowledge-intensive activities at the global level (in the financial sector and international organisations in Geneva and pharmaceuticals and life sciences in Basel) and the political, human and financial resources to coordinate activities within the CBRs and attract a large share of cross-border workers (Sohn and Reitel 2016: 312-316).

Table 4.3 – Inhabitants, cross-border workers and cross-border share of employment on the Swiss side of the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs in 2020

Territory	Inhabitants	Cross-border workers	Cross-border share of employment
Canton of Geneva	504,000	91,800	24.0%
Basel region	485,000	57,500	32.4%

Source: FSO 2021

The centralisation and attractiveness of economic activity in the mid-size, highly internationalised cities of Geneva and Basel tend to create a strong functional specialisation on both sides of the border. As a result, the national territories are specialised according to their advantages: While the Swiss metropolitan cores represent dynamic economic centres that attract a large workforce, the French peripheral regions tend to be considered suburban extensions resulting from the cheaper and more available land (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020: 597). However, while both CBRs endorse strong interactions with the countries on the other side of the territorial state borders, they present different cross-border integration profiles, as the Greater Geneva CBR appears to be less institutionalised than the Eurodistrict of Basel: "In Basel, the integration of the peripheries seems to serve the

economic influence of the urban core, whereas in Geneva the integration of the French suburban area has resulted in a negotiation to rebalance the functions between the centre and its periphery" (Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009: 933). Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild (2020: 603) argue that these different levels of integration leading to a functional specialisation of space between the metropolitan cores and the neighbouring peripheral regions are the result of several decades of diverging cross-border integration policies.

Furthermore, the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons between Switzerland and the EU, which came into force in 2002, and Switzerland's entry into the Schengen Area in 2008 made it easier for EU citizens to live and work in Switzerland and have been a catalyst for the intensification of cross-border relations.[19] This is especially true for the cantons of Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country, whose higher wages (compared with those on the other side of the border) attract many French cross-border workers. Furthermore, it is important to underline that Switzerland lacks an indigenous workforce, which strengthens the employability of cross-border workers and offers greater diversity on the labour market (Dubois 2019).

Finally, at the time of this writing during the second quarter of 2022, the canton of Geneva held the first position in Switzerland with 100,445 cross-border workers (i.e. 27 per cent of the total number of cross-border workers in the country), while the cantons of Basel-City and Basel-Country were in third place (behind the canton of Ticino) with 58,891 cross-border workers (i.e. 16 per cent of the total number of cross-border workers in the country) (see Figure 4.9). These numbers demonstrate the importance of the cantons of Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country regarding their strong cross-border employment dynamics. I chose to focus on the cantons of Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country because, as mentioned above, they are considered to be strong, functionally integrated CBRs and represent models of cross-border cooperation at the European level, unlike the canton of Ticino, which is considered less structured and characterised by weak social integration and limited institutional collaboration (Pilotti and Mazzoleni 2023).

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[19] The Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons is part of a set of bilateral treaties between Switzerland and the EU regarding various areas of cooperation such as public markets, agriculture, transports, research and trade.

Figure 4.9 – Percentage of cross-border workers in Geneva, Ticino, Basel (City and Country) and other Swiss cantons
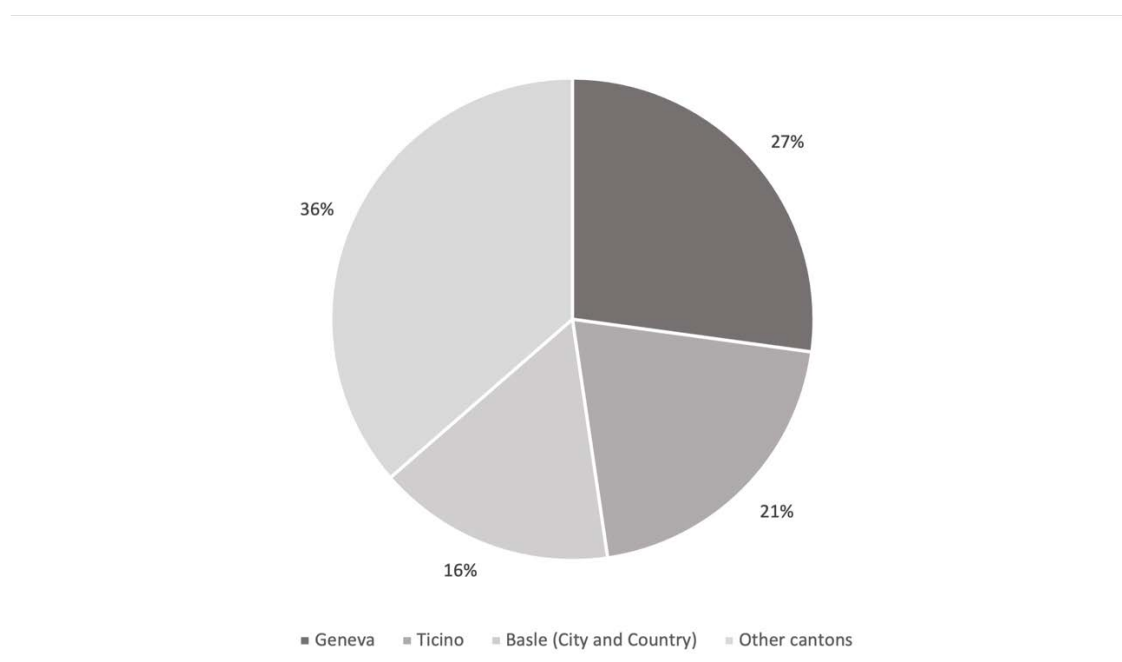
Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

4.3.1. The Greater Geneva Cross-Border Region

The integration process of the Greater Geneva cross-border cooperation between the Swiss cantons of Geneva and Vaud and the French departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie has been in place since 1973. According to Herzog and Sohn (2014), this process is led by the France-Geneva Regional Committee composed of Swiss local and regional authorities and representatives of the French government to enhance cross-border functional interactions. One of the goals was for the canton of Geneva to avoid being marginalised after Swiss voters had rejected joining the European Economic Area in 1992. The intensification of cross-border integration aimed to assert the centrality of the canton of Geneva, given its economic growth and work potential for French cross-border workers (Leresche and Joye 1995; Sohn and Reitel 2016). The political governance of the conurbation *per se* went into effect in 2004 with the creation of a regional association, the Franco-Valdo-Genevoise agglomeration project, which is supported by both the Swiss and French governments. This regional association has sought to bring together local and regional authorities on either side of the border to plan transport infrastructure and urban developments. The development of

the CEVA railway junction between Geneva Cornavin and Annemasse, which has been strongly supported by the Swiss Confederation and established as a transborder network between the Swiss and French rail networks, is an example of transport infrastructure planning resulting from this regional association (Vuignier 2015). In 2012, the cross-border region implemented a new legal tool (i.e. the Local Grouping for Cross-border Cooperation) to build a more permanent mode of governance and reinforce the autonomy of the cross-border entity from the France-Geneva Regional Committee. Today, this cross-border cooperation covers 2,000 km² and a total of 212 municipalities, and the canton of Geneva shares 95 per cent of its territorial border with France. The recognition of cross-border cooperation by the Swiss and French governments has firmly contributed to enriching its legitimacy (Sohn and Reitel 2016: 316). More recently, in 2019, the inauguration of the Leman Express – an extended transport network connecting Switzerland and France – furthered the railway infrastructure of the cross-border area by extending the previous CEVA railway junction.

According to Sohn, Reitel and Walther (2009), the cross-border cooperation of Greater Geneva is characterised by a strong functional form of cross-border interdependence regarding the intensity of socio-economic interactions between the two sides of the national border. This process resulted primarily from a de-bordering condition aimed at strengthening the cross-border ties between Switzerland and France and Europeanising the dynamic at play in the cross-border territorial governance at the start of the cross-border integration project. Local political actors and the Swiss and French nation-states have strongly supported the development of cross-border cooperation, even as the socio-economic interdependencies have generated discontent among the conservative Swiss residents who regard the open border as a threat to their national interests and values and their well-being (Herzog and Sohn 2014).

As stated, the Greater Geneva cross-border cooperation is characterised by a strong functional form of cross-border interdependence, as well as a strong cross-border differential between the canton of Geneva and its French counterparts regarding jobs and wages (Delaugerre 2012; Gumy, Drevon, and Kaufmann 2022). As such, the strong economic differentials between Switzerland and France have increased cross-border flows across the national borders for social and economic exchanges of labour, production networks, shopping and residence (Moullé 2002). The city of Geneva is very attractive to the tertiary sector because of its banks and international and non-governmental

organisations and, thus, has a robust position on the circuits of globalisation. A centre–periphery cross-border relation has developed as the flows of cross-border workers move from the border peripheries towards the urban centre of Geneva (Decoville et al. 2013). While the urban growth of residential constructions has developed on the French side because of the constraints of Switzerland's Federal Act on Spatial Planning of 1979 to preserve agricultural land, the concentration of economic growth and jobs lies in the canton of Geneva, which has led to a highly asymmetrical functional integration within the cross-border urban space (Delaugerre 2012; Herzog and Sohn 2014). Owing to these spatial and socio-economic inequalities, traffic congestion from cross-border flows in Geneva generates high levels of anger and resentment among the Swiss population (Sohn 2020). In this regard, an urban development strategy has been planned for 2030 with the goal of equally sharing the resident population between Switzerland and France and creating a third of jobs in France to enhance a common sense of belonging and a shared vision of the future of this cross-border cooperation (Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009).

In summary, the Greater Geneva cross-border cooperation is characterised by a specialised integrated cross-border territorial system (i.e. supporting a functional division of space), meaning that the cross-border workflow is moving from the periphery to the metropolitan centre – with economic activities and jobs concentrated in the metropolitan centre – while the residential flow is moving from the metropolitan centre to the periphery, as the latter is attractive in residential terms (Decoville et al. 2013; Saint-Ouen 2012). At the same time, however, the agglomeration project has managed to sustain strong cross-border territorialisation (Sohn and Reitel 2016). Finally, the number of cross-border workers has increased from around 35,000 in 2002 to 100,500 in 2022, which is an increase of 187% over 20 years (see Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10 – Number of French cross-border workers in the canton of Geneva from 2002 to 2022
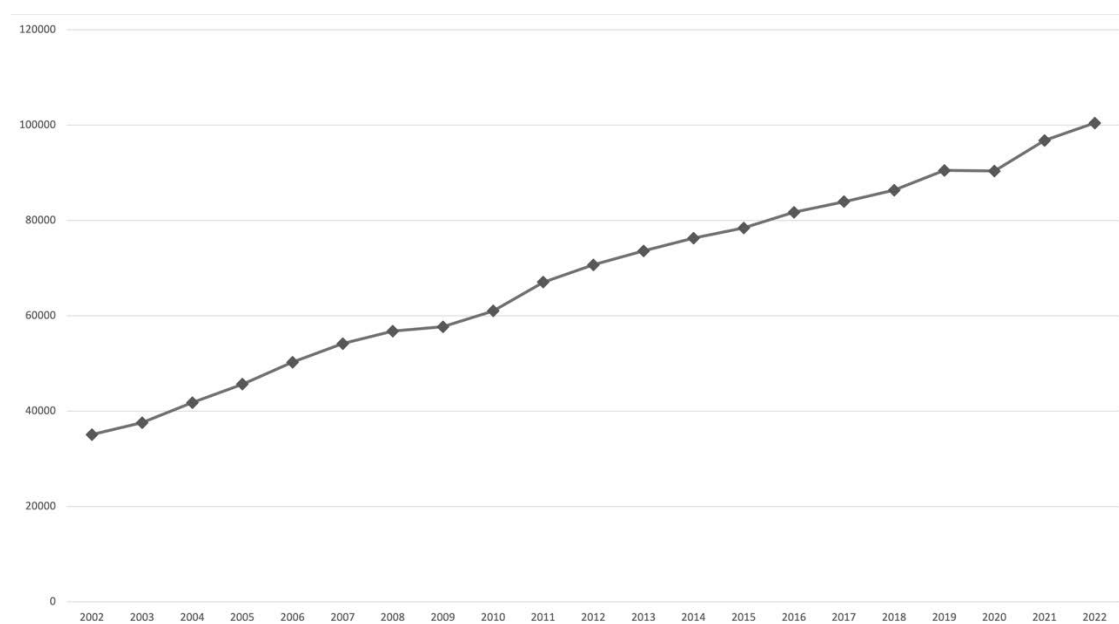
Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

4.3.2. The Eurodistrict of Basel Cross-Border Region

The Swiss cantons of Basel-City and Basel-Country, the neighbouring French department of Haut-Rhin and the neighbouring German Land of Baden-Württemberg have jointly developed the cross-border cooperation of the Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel, and the Basel region (and especially the canton and city of Basel-City) has established several cross-border structures since the 1960s (Dubois 2019; Duvinage 2020; Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009; Walther and Reitel 2013). In 1963, the first cross-border cooperation project (i.e. the Regio Basiliensis) was established, which still fosters regional cross-border development. In 1990, the European cross-border INTERREG programme offered new tools to support and develop cross-border development by reinforcing the territorial planning systems between the different neighbouring countries. Since 2002, a construction agency has emerged – currently known as the Trinational Agglomeration and Eurodistrict of Basel – and is involved in construction, regional planning and sustainable development. In addition, the Metrobasel association was created in 2006 as a think tank to promote cross-border cooperation regarding economic prosperity and competitiveness at the international level (Fricke 2015). As stated, these cooperation structures are essentially part of the Basel-City

metropolitan actors' strategy to integrate the cross-border region into the networks of a globalised economy (Sohn and Reitel 2016: 313). In this context, the cross-border region of the Eurodistrict of Basel is considered one of the most successful and long-standing forms of cross-border cooperation in Europe, especially in the light of its functional integration in terms of spatial planning. One example is public transport, which is an issue that has always been at the centre of interest and is subsidised by the Swiss Confederation Agglomeration Policy (Fricke 2015: 865; Walther and Reitel 2013: 218). Sohn, Reitel, and Walther (2009: 935) assert that this cross-border cooperation shows that "a capitalisation of cross-border experiences over a period of forty-five years as proven to be a determining factor in the development of a joint strategy and the implementation of active cooperation". Therefore, and thanks to the efficient cross-border public system developed through close institutional cooperation, the cross-border region of the Eurodistrict of Basel does not face tensions between the border populations, unlike in Geneva, especially in terms of road congestion (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020: 601).

Similarly to the Greater Geneva CBR, one of the key moments of the intensification of cross-border integration was Swiss voters' rejection in 1992 of membership in the European Economic Area. To prevent the marginalisation of the Swiss cantons of Basel-City and Basel-Country concerning the European Union, both cantons (and especially Basel-City) wanted to ensure a leading position by attracting numerous cross-border workers from France and Germany (Sohn and Reitel 2016: 313). The canton of Basel-City appears to be very attractive in the secondary sector for biotech and medical technologies. Moreover, the model of cross-border cooperation is based on a centre–periphery relation, as the flow of cross-border workers is moving from border peripheries towards the urban centre and is, therefore, polarised between the canton of Basel-City, which is wealthier, and the surrounding regions (Decoville et al. 2013; Reitel 2013; Walther and Reitel 2013). However, contrary to the Greater Geneva cross-border region, the cross-border cooperation of the Eurodistrict of Basel is seen as polarised integration because the flows of labour and the residential displacements both converge on the dominant urban centre (Decoville et al. 2013: 232).

And yet, while the cross-border area is characterised by a centre–periphery relation, the canton of Basel-City does not dominate the peripheral actors, even if they have substantial resources to propose new ideas, establish a partners network and build infrastructure (Walther and Reitel 2013: 234; 2012: 32). The Regio Basiliensis created in the 1960s

involves representatives from civil society, the private sector, the cantons and universities to bring together the economic and political interests of the cross-border metropolitan governance (Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009: 935). The frequent interplay with its French and German peripheral counterparts has allowed Basel-City to undertake major infrastructure projects such as the EuroAirport (considered a symbol of French-Swiss cooperation) and environmental facilities located outside Swiss territory through negotiation with border partners (Dubois 2017: 156; Walther and Reitel 2012: 20) so that development strategies affecting public transport, among others, would not be based on wealth and political differentials or national interests (Walther and Reitel 2012: 31).

To sum up, the cross-border region of the Eurodistrict of Basel represents a genuine example of cross-border collaboration for planning and transport (Dubois 2017: 158), and it is viewed as one of the best examples of cooperation in Europe (Reitel 2013: 251). Furthermore, as argued by Fricke (2015: 860), "the spatial governance in the multi-scalar system of Basel responds to the functional demand for cooperation due to the socio-economic interdependencies in the metropolitan area. It shows the stability over time, despite the structural adaptation of existing organizations and the establishment of new ones." Finally, the number of cross-border workers between the cantons of Basel-City and Basel-Country has grown from 45,000 in 2002 to 60,000 in 2022, an increase of 33% over 20 years, which is far less than in Geneva (see Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11 – Number of French cross-border workers in the cantons of Basel-City and Basel-Country from 2002 to 2022
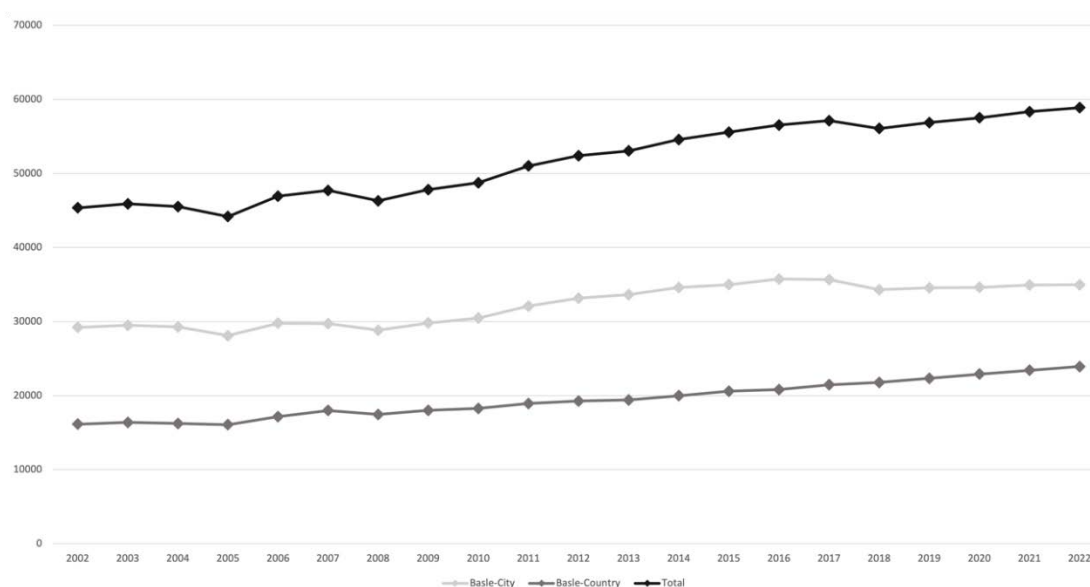
Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

4.4. Conclusion: Miscellaneous Institutional and Political Contextual Configurations Leading to Distinct Patterns of Political Mobilisation and Competition

This chapter aimed to explore the distinct contextual political, institutional and structural contexts in which RWPPs have evolved to better understand the dialectical relationship of how they have been influencing and influenced by the political and institutional structures in which they compete. By considering the multi-level political and institutional configurations of the French and Swiss political and party systems, the aim was to avoid taking the national level for granted but to take into account the regional and cross-border territorial, political and institutional configurations in which RWPPs have developed. Thus, by taking a cross-border perspective that goes beyond the national level *per se*, there could be a better understanding of the multi-scalar contextual dimensions at stake in RWPPs' discursive construction of borders.

Firstly, while both the Swiss and the French political systems are considered well-established democracies on the Western European political landscape and are characterised by their multi-level political, institutional and territorial configurations (albeit to a different extent), they differ greatly with respect to the dynamics of the political and party systems.

On the one hand, the Swiss political system can be considered strongly decentralised through its federalist institutional configuration (Vatter 2022). In this context, challenger RWPPs such as the SVP and the MCG can use leverage to gain electoral visibility and influence policy changes by taking advantage of the opportunities provided by direct democracy, the proportional electoral system and the rule of concordance (Mazzoleni 2008). The unprecedented rise of both the SVP and the MCG has benefitted from the challenges created by globalisation and European integration and the strong focus on identity politics, immigration, asylum, nationalism and cross-border issues. Furthermore, when considering the SVP, while there was a process to nationalise the party in the 1990s, the sub-state cantonal branches still enjoy significant autonomy regarding the representation of the party's interests at the regional level (Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016). As such, it can be argued that the party organisation oscillates simultaneously between state-wide

centralisation and sub-state decentralisation. The MCG and the Geneva SVP cantonal branches have been successfully competing at the sub-national and cross-border territorial levels, among others, by providing cantonal party manifestos. By contrast, while the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP are successful political parties within their respective cantonal landscapes, they do not focus on sub-national or cross-border issues, as they rely on the national SVP party manifesto (for more on this topic, see Chapter 7).

On the other hand, the French political system is strongly centralised, nationalised and organised around presidential power despite the decentralisation reforms of 1982 (Caramani 2004; Haegel 2009). As a result, challenger parties such as the RN have faced difficulties competing and gaining electoral visibility within the party system – firstly, because of the constraints imposed by the two-ballot majoritarian system, and secondly, because of the cordon sanitaire strategy of the other political parties, which do not want to build a coalition with the RN (Ivaldi 2018a). At the same time, the RN has managed to become politically relevant and establish itself in the French party system by benefitting from the European and regional elections held through the proportional electoral system (Machin 1990). Furthermore, the RN has managed to appropriate migration-related issues by offering citizens an alternative ignored by the mainstream traditional parties (Meguid 2008). Finally, the RN has succeeded in turning from a niche into a mainstream party, especially by normalising its right-wing populist ideology with a focus on the concept of "Frenchness", as well as anti-immigration, Eurosceptic and anti-globalisation issues, through a process of *dédiabolisation* led by Marine Le Pen. Regarding organisational patterns, contrary to the SVP and MCG, the RN is still characterised by a strong centralisation of power at the national level, as well as authoritarian leadership and a lack of intra-party democracy (Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016). As such, while the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Grand Est regions constitute major strongholds for the RN and the party tries to adapt to territorialised opportunities and regional outcomes to target regional constituencies, the development of party platforms and policies remains centralised and structured around national interests (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018).

In turn, the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs are among the most integrated regions in Europe, with strong cross-border employment dynamics and advanced forms of cooperation in urban planning, transport and economic development and cross-border infrastructure (Decoville et al. 2013; Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Sohn 2020). It has been argued that the varying levels of socio-economic development on both sides of

the border are fertile ground for exacerbating the tensions between the people who benefit from European integration and those who do not and that RWPPs can act as typical political actors working to (re)configure borders as tools that delimit, distinguish and eject people from their territories (Herzog and Sohn 2014). Furthermore, while both CBRs are characterised by strong functional integration between the countries on both sides of the border, they present different cross-border integration profiles due to diverging cross-border integration policies. As a result, the Greater Geneva CBR appears to be less institutionalised than the Eurodistrict of Basel (Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009). Moreover, the structural spatial and economic inequalities between the two sides of the border typically lead to anger and resentment among the Swiss population in the Greater Geneva CBR but not in the Eurodistrict of Basel. Finally, it is worth noting that Swiss federalism has provided the cantons with strong autonomy, allowing local authorities to implement cross-border cooperation governance at the local level. By contrast, the centralisation of the French political system has mainly returned cross-border decision-making to the central government (Sohn and Reitel 2016; Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009).

This chapter is crucial to understanding the complex contextual multi-level dynamics at play in party politics and how specific political and party systems provide different opportunities and constraints relating to multi-scalar territorial spaces. The theoretical framework (Chapter 2) showed that political parties must adapt to multi-scalar territorial politics regarding mobilisation and competition patterns in multi-level political and territorial systems (Deschouwer 2003; Detterbeck 2012; León and Scantamburlo 2022; Sassen 2006). This adaptation to territorial politics is the result of, among others, globalisation and the European integration process, which have shaped a territorial restructuring of politics across multiple scales (Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017; Keating 2021; Perkmann and Sum 2002; Swenden and Maddens 2008). Hence, while the national political and party systems are key to defining the institutional and structural rules of the game for political parties, they still have to adapt to global and local institutional and territorial contexts (e.g. CBRs) that include multiple levels of power, strategies, practices and interests (Durand 2015; Elias, Szöcsik, and Zuber 2015; Popescu 2008). Thus, the opportunities and constraints taking place at different territorial levels have a strong impact on the competition and mobilisation of political parties, depending on contextual factors (Braun and Schmitt 2020; Gross and Jankowski 2020; Heinisch, Massetti, and Mazzoleni 2020; Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel 2018). Following this exploration of the respective political, institutional

and structural contexts in which the case-selected RWPPs have evolved and competed under the tenets of the DHA (see Wodak 2001a), these contextual backgrounds will be useful in the next chapters when using a cross-border perspective to empirically explore, understand and capture RWPPs' discursive construction of borders.

5. Border Issues: Exploring the Mapping of Topical Structures in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel Cross-Border Regions during the Covid-19 Pandemic

To understand how RWPPs discursively shape borders, this chapter will examine and compare the border issues at stake in the discourses of RWPPs operating in two particular cross-border regions (CBRs): Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel. The research questions investigated in this chapter are as follows: What kinds of border issues did RWPPs discursively frame in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs during the Covid-19 pandemic? And are there similarities and differences in how RWPPs discursively shape border issues between and within the two CBRs?

As argued in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), CBRs represent territorial spaces where people deal every day with the cross-border mobility of people, goods, capital and services resulting from the proximity with state borders (Jensen and Richardson 2004; Lamour 2014). This leads to transnational territorial logics in which economic and symbolic resources are shared across territorial borders (Perkmann 2007; Sohn 2016; Varol and Soylemez 2018). Moreover, the physical proximity with the border could lead to a greater politicisation of issues relating to territorial identity, which forms part of an everyday process of political, social and cultural bordering (Scott 2020b). Thus, proximity creates new political rationales that emerge from the specific symbolisation of the border and the multiplicity of lived experiences that relate to the transnational dynamics characterising such regions (Laine 2016; 2021).

The RWPPs in the two CBRs covered by the empirical analysis are the sub-state cantonal branches of the Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP) in the Geneva and Basel borderlands, namely the Geneva SVP, the Basel-City SVP and the Basel-Country SVP, as well as the Geneva Citizens' Movement (Mouvement Citoyens Genevois, MCG) and the sub-state branches of the National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN), namely

the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and RN Haut-Rhin evolving in the Grand Est and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes regions.

To analyse the RWPPs' discursive construction of border issues, I will use the context of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. With the partial closure of state borders and the reinforcement of border controls during the first phase of the crisis, the pandemic had a profound influence on the politicisation of borders and presented RWPPs with an opportunity to condemn external threats and reinforce spatial aspects of identity (Casaglia et al. 2020; Bobba and Hubé 2021). In addition, as a crisis, the pandemic context brought instability regarding economic, political, social and cultural issues (on crises, see Hay 1999), which the RWPPs exploited. I will explore to what extent the pandemic context provided new opportunities for RWPPs to discursively shape border issues.

Crises usually create an opportunity for RWPPs to gain momentum (Moffitt 2015), and the Covid-19 pandemic was no exception. On the one hand, the pandemic generated a different and new context that RWPPs tried to adapt to. On the other hand, the suddenness of the crisis, as well as its external and global nature, produced different outcomes for RWPPs; their responses to the pandemic have not been the same everywhere, and contextual variations have proved to be important (Biancalana, Heinisch, and Mazzoleni 2021; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2020). Nevertheless, this crisis was clearly an opportunity for RWPPs to use borders as rhetorical resources to support their claims – not only to advocate them as a way to protect against external threats but also to respond symbolically to transnational flows, underline eroded sovereignty and the limits of supranational powers and dramatize outside threats (Brubaker 2017; Casaglia et al. 2020). The crisis enhanced the clichéd narrative of RWPPs claiming they would keep their territory safe against outside threats while fetishising physical borders designed to protect their territorial sovereignty and sacralising borders as a real and imagined space of containment for the territorial body (Casaglia et al. 2020; Paasi et al. 2022; Scott 2017).

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 1 provides a conceptual framework defining border issues. Section 2 deals with the context of the case study. As right-wing populist discourse is context-dependent, it is important to identify the contextual backgrounds in which actors' discourse is produced. Section 3 gives insights into the design of the research and the methodology. In Section 4, I explore what kind of border issues the selected actors discursively shaped during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and how such a discourse has been developed by considering the similarities and differences between and within the Greater

Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs. Section 5 makes some concluding remarks about the empirical findings.

5.1. Right-Wing Populism and the Concept of Border Issues

The theoretical framework (Chapter 2) demonstrated that borders should not be considered simply as objective lines on the ground but rather as ephemeral devices that various actors shape, transform and compete for at different levels and in different places (Axelsson 2022; Casaglia et al. 2020; Laine 2016; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Popescu 2012; Scott 2020b; Storey 2020). The recent development of the concept of the border in critical border studies has shown that borders are social constructs relating to territorial identities. This understanding aims to overcome what has been called the territorial trap – that is, the reification and essentialisation of nation-states and national borders – when using a state-centred perspective (Agnew 1994; 2008). Processes like globalisation and the role of transnational flows have dramatically changed this state-centred perspective (Sassen 2006).

The literature has rarely focused on RWPPs' discursive construction of borders. However, borders can be considered malleable political devices used by these actors to pursue specific goals (e.g. to highlight, contextualise and legitimise a variety of issues and themes) at a discursive level (Laine 2016). Among others, RWPPs can use them to as a symbol of protecting territorial sovereignty against alleged threats (Wodak 2021b; Casaglia 2020). RWPPs do so by essentialising an imagined community (Anderson 2006) and by symbolically constructing territorial borders linked to a specific space of identity (Kolossov 2005). Thus, RWPPs not only have the potential to be involved in policy-making on the issue but also play a major role in giving socio-political meaning to the border (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999; Brambilla 2015; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017; Wodak 2021a).

It is important to note that borders can appear in right-wing populist discourses in different ways and at different levels. For instance, some populist actors proclaim explicitly that they want to build physical borders to protect their country (e.g. Donald Trump or Austria; for the Austrian case, see Rheindorf and Wodak 2018). In this case, as in the case of the discourse on border control, borders are directly referred to as concrete entities. But they

can also stand for – and, thus, represent – defending territorial identities against the threat of immigration. Here, borders are symbolic devices used to talk about something else. They indirectly represent the division between "us" and "them". Therefore, while there is generally an elective affinity between RWPPs' discursive practices and borders, a conceptualisation and an empirical analysis of how they use borders in their discourse and of the specific issues that RWPPs shape in this regard are still lacking.

To fill this gap, the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) defines an issue as a point, matter or problem requiring public and political attention (Sheppard-Sellam 2019). Neveu (2015) defines "public problems" as the conversion of social facts into an object of concern and debate. Thus, border issues can be considered public problems that relate to the border and need to be addressed. Hence, RWPPs can embody actors or "entrepreneurs" that play a role in shaping border issues. Against this backdrop, we have seen that borders can be intended either as technical landscapes of social control or as discursive landscapes of social power. According to Paasi (2013), both of these modalities represent the material and the cultural-symbolic practices involved in constructing borders. Consequently, I conceptualised two specific types of right-wing populist border construction, namely the material and normative construction of borders as physical devices or the symbolic construction of borders as tools of inclusion and exclusion.

According to this conceptualisation, border issues can be intended as dealing directly with the border as a physical device (e.g. a wall or a device that offers protection with the help of border controls) or as indirect symbolic and identity tools (e.g. when considering the mobilisation of issues relating to the flow of people or territorial identities, as in the case of immigration or European integration).

5.2. Contextual Dimensions: Border Policies, the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Cross-Border Regions

Borders are important for Switzerland but not only because half of the 26 Swiss cantons border a foreign country. Since World War I, Switzerland has adopted stringent and restrictive immigration policies based on the rhetoric of *Überfremdung*, meaning that

foreigners are perceived as damaging and threatening to Swiss identity and values and that the national culture and interests must be of primary concern (Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006). Despite the more open immigration policies that have followed the implementation of the 2002 Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP) and Switzerland's entry into the Schengen Area in 2008, RWPPs regularly use the rhetoric of *Überfremdung* to position themselves against immigrants and the EU, of which the country is not a member, although it is more and more involved in the integration process.

The enduring salience of this issue in Switzerland is demonstrated by the fact that, in 2020, the SVP launched a campaign for a popular initiative entitled the "limitation initiative", which sought to cancel the AFMP[20] by emphasising the importance of protecting Switzerland's sovereignty against the EU with regard to immigration. Unsurprisingly, the initiative was supported by the MCG in Geneva. It was initially scheduled to be voted on in the spring of 2020 but was eventually postponed to September due to the coronavirus outbreak, and the campaign coincided with the first wave of the pandemic. On 27 September 2020, the limitation initiative was rejected by 61.7 per cent of Swiss voters. Moreover, it was strongly rejected in the cantons of Geneva (69 per cent), Basel-Country (61.4 per cent) and Basel-City (74.7 per cent). The results confirm the cantons' Europhile attitudes, as well as the strong and functional form of cross-border interdependence that characterises them (Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009).

By contrast, borders and the implementation of immigration policies vary in France. Since the 19th century, France has oscillated between open and restrictive migration policies, and borders have played an important role in shaping the concomitant inclusion or exclusion policies (Galy 2021; Mathieu 2016). Unlike Switzerland, however, France is a member of the European Union. In this context, the supranational policy-making and institutionalisation of the EU have played a decisive role in (re)shaping and implementing new international policies relating to migration and border issues (Carrera and Guild 2008; Geddes 2001).

As demonstrated in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), while the Swiss political system – in particular, direct democracy – provides challenger parties with useful tools to impose their political and ideological agenda regarding, for instance, immigration and border issues

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[20] The initiative demanded that if it passed and no agreement can be negotiated between the Swiss national government and the EU within 12 months, the AFMP would be scrapped.

(e.g. with the launch of popular initiatives such as the "limitation initiative"), the centralisation and presidentialisation of the French political system and the lack of direct democracy tools in comparison with Switzerland limit the means for RWPPs to challenge and have a concrete impact on migration and border policies. At the same time, the RN has been successfully constructing a discourse that depicts immigrants as enemies of the nation and standing against the European Union with a strong focus on restoring national sovereignty (Ivaldi 2018b).

The context of the pandemic also brought borders back to the forefront of political agendas (Lara-Valencia and Laine 2022). RWPPs used the pandemic context to condemn open borders, exclude immigrants and criticise the EU's supranational decision-making processes in managing the crisis (Biancalana, Heinisch, and Mazzoleni 2021; Wondreys and Mudde 2022). Indeed, RWPPs often operate as entrepreneurs fuelling crises (Moffitt 2015; Taggart 2000), and the Covid-19 pandemic has proved to be a fertile ground for such parties to criticise the policies implemented by governments and benefit from the crisis (Bobba and Hubé 2021). As argued by Casaglia et al. (2020), the pandemic deeply influenced the politicisation of borders by RWPPs by presenting new opportunities to denounce external threats and reinforce spatial aspects of identity. Furthermore, and as argued in the introduction of this chapter, the crisis enhanced the clichéd narrative of RWPPs wishing to keep their territory safe from outside threats by fetishising physical borders that are designed to protect territorial sovereignty and sacralising borders as a real and imagined space of containment of the territorial body (Casaglia et al. 2020; Paasi et al. 2022; Scott 2017). This led to the pandemic as a powerful stimulus fuelling (re)bordering narratives and practices through a sovereigntist myth (Cole and Dodds 2021).

For instance, owing to the pandemic, borders within the European Union were partially closed. However, not all borders were closed for the same time periods across the European landscape (see Medeiros et al. 2021). The state border between Switzerland and France was partially closed between 16 March and 15 June 2020, and during this time, state borders were closed for everyone except essential cross-border workers with work permits (e.g. cross-border healthcare workers). However, the spread of the virus did not evolve in the same way in different European countries, including in Switzerland and France. At the same time, the Swiss cantons of Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country were among the first cantons to register a Covid-19 infection. The three cantons were particularly affected by the first Covid-19 wave compared with other Swiss cantons. The French departments of Ain,

Haute-Savoie and Haut-Rhin also experienced a high rate of infection during the first wave of the pandemic. For instance, in Haut-Rhin, the high rate of infection was primarily due to an international evangelical meeting in Mulhouse, which has been considered the major source of infection in the area.

As shown in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), the CBRs of Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel are significant territorial spaces to explore RWPPs' discursive construction of borders as they are two of the most important European CBRs in terms of cross-border flows given their strong cross-border employment dynamics and the advanced forms of cooperation they provide (see Table 4.3). At the same time, they present different forms and degrees of institutionalisation, which could lead to different types of discursive border construction depending on the asymmetrical developments on both sides of the border (Herzog and Sohn 2014).

These two CBRs are characterised by the presence of distinct RWPPs on either side of the border. I focus on the Geneva SVP and the MCG, which operate in the Geneva borderland, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP in the Basel borderland, the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie in the French borderland part of the Greater Geneva CBR and the RN Haut-Rhin in the French borderland of the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR.

Regarding these RWPPs' electoral strength (see Figure 5.1) and as presented in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), the Geneva SVP has always been a weak force in the canton of Geneva because of the canton's high level of internationalisation. The MCG rose to prominence in 2013 by successfully tapping into the cross-border insecurity experienced by the Genevan population, but its support declined in 2018 and 2023 as cantonal preference – one of the party's flagship issues – went mainstream on the Genevan political landscape. At the time, the Geneva SVP and the MCG could occasionally work together to boost their political strength. Meanwhile, in the Basel borderland, the Basel-Country SVP has always been a strong political force in the cantonal parliament. For example, it was the strongest party in the 2011 and 2015 cantonal elections and also performed well in the 2023 cantonal elections. Similarly, the Basel-City SVP has been a rather powerful political force in the cantonal parliament, ranking as the second-largest political party from 2004 to 2016. For their part, the RN Haut-Rhin and the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie have been strong political forces on the regional councils of the Grand Est and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes regions, respectively, despite the cordon sanitaire strategy that the RN faced on the French political landscape at the national level.

Figure 5.1 – Electoral vote share (in per cent) of the RWPPs during cantonal and regional elections
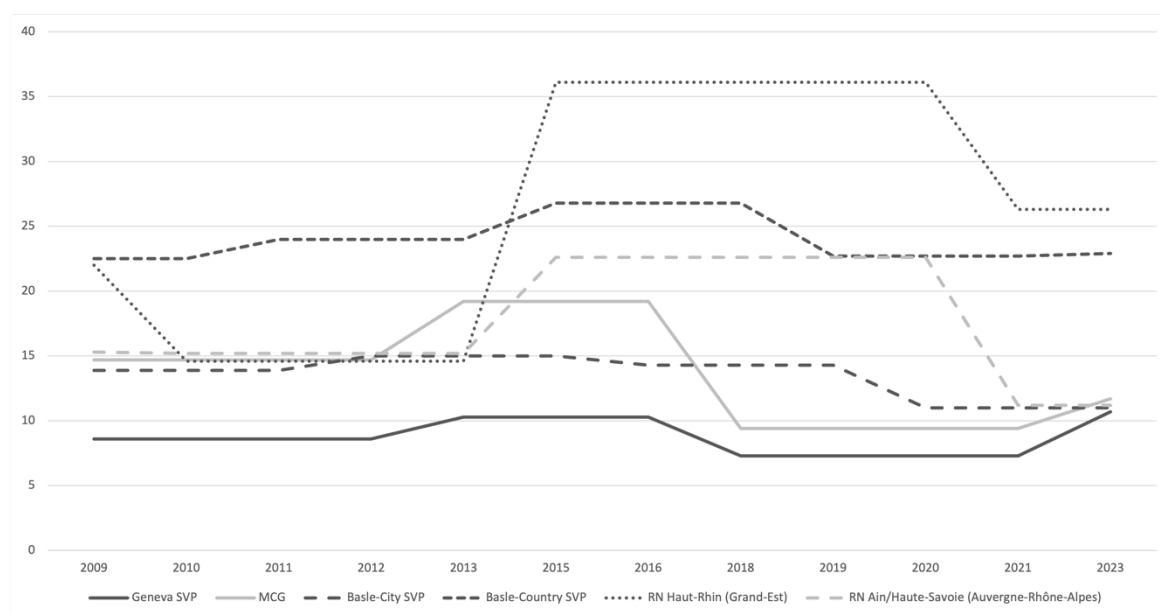
Note: The election years differ among Swiss cantons. For Geneva: 2009, 2013, 2018 and 2023. For Basel-City: 2012, 2016 and 2020. For Basel-Country: 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023. For the regional elections in France: 2010, 2015 and 2021.

Source: Plateforme ouverte des données publiques françaises (data.gouv.fr) and Cantonal Statistical Offices of Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country

5.3. Methodology: Investigating the Mapping of Topical Structures

This chapter will focus on topics as important linguistic means to investigate RWPPs' discursive construction of border issues. As shown in the methodological chapter (Chapter 3), topics represent the most salient themes and information provided within discourses and give texts their topical structure. As a reminder, and as argued by Van Dijk (1991: 72), topics can be defined as follows:

> In more theoretical terms, topics are defined as semantic macro-structures. These global, overall meaning structures of a text consist of a hierarchically arranged set of macro-propositions, which are derived from the meanings (propositions) of the sentences of the text by way of macro-rules. These rules reduce the complex information of the text to its essential gist (…) Each of these summarizing macro-propositions is what we call a topic. The overall meaning of a text consists of a hierarchy of such topics, because each series of topics may in turn be summarized again at a higher level.

Against this background, the linguistic aim of this chapter is to map discourses' topical structures relating to RWPPs' discursive construction of border issues. To this end, I explore how RWPPs' discourses on borders are mapped around specific topics relating to the construction of borders as either physical or symbolical devices (i.e. borders as direct or indirect issues).

The discourses I collected focus on direct party communication. I gathered data from 1 January to 31 August 2020 – that is, during the first phases of the pandemic until just before the beginning of the second wave. It was during this first period that the crisis was at its peak. Also, with regard to border-related issues, it was during this first phase that the country's national borders were sealed as tightly as possible to contain the contagion. This factor deeply influenced the discursive construction of borders.

As the aim is to analyse RWPPs' discourses, I decided to use four parties' direct communication channels, including official Facebook posts, tweets, articles published by the official party newspapers and official party releases, as sources for the analysis (see Table 5.1).

For this period, I selected texts that politicised the Covid-19 issue; among them, only texts with direct or indirect references to the border were included in the sample. By politicisation, I mean the inclusion of Covid-19 in political debates and the structuring of the resulting contentious narratives. With respect to border issues, I mean questions related not only to border control but also to broader issues relating to the free movement of persons and European integration. In these discourses, the border is mobilised not only as the physical one but also as a symbolic device that divides "us" from "them". On the basis of these criteria, a total of 124 texts were selected (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 – Number of analysed documents and sources

Cross-border region	Party	Number of documents (total = 124)	Sources
Greater Geneva	SVP (Geneva)	59	Edition spéciale de l'UDC Genève (Official Party Newspaper) (7); Facebook posts (UDC Genève) (52)
	MCG	13	Official Party Releases (www.mcge.ch and www.tdg.ch/les-blogs) (10); Facebook posts (MCG Officiel) (3)
	RN (Ain and Haute-Savoie)	24	Tweets (Rassemblement National – Ain) (1); Facebook posts (Groupe Rassemblement National Auvergne Rhône-Alpes) (21), (Rassemblement National Haute-Savoie) (2)
Eurodistrict of Basel	SVP (Basel-City and Basel-Country)	9	Tweets (SVP Basel-Stadt) (1); Facebook posts (SVP Baselland) (8)
	RN (Haut-Rhin)	19	Tweets (Groupe Rassemblement National - Région Grand Est) (1); Facebook posts (Rassemblement National Alsace) (14), (Groupe Rassemblement National – Région Alsace Champagne-Ardenne Lorraine) (4)

Interestingly, while the Geneva SVP and the MCG provide discourses anchored in the regional scale, the discourses of the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP mostly rely on the national scale (except for one Facebook post by the president of the cantonal Basel-Country SVP, Dominik Straumann). This shows how seldom the Basel-City and Basel-Country branches of the SVP frame regional issues (see also Chapter 7). Furthermore, the low number of sources (8) shows that the discursive construction of borders does not appear to be important for these cantonal sections in comparison with the Geneva SVP. Regarding the discourses of the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and RN Haut-Rhin, they are usually re-tweets

or re-posts of national speeches by Marine Le Pen. This further proves that the discourse of the RN is strongly centralised and nationalised (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018).

The selected texts were coded and analysed with the help of the MAXQDA software. I inductively coded texts relating to border issues that were intended as concrete problems to be addressed by RWPPs and dealing directly or indirectly with the border: not only issues such as border control and patrolling but also immigration and European integration, when it involves either a transfer of sovereignty that entails consequences for the flow of people and goods or the country's identity. Thus, I used the coding and code frequencies functionalities of MAXQDA (see Chapter 3) to map the topics and sub-topics relating to border issues and explore the most important themes in discourses. As the analysis focuses on discourses, the units of analysis are not single words but segments that correspond to the sequences of utterances and sentences, distinct propositions, topics or communicative functions in a text (Upton and Cohen 2009).

5.4. The Right-Wing Populist Discursive Construction of Border Issues in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel Cross-Border Regions: Empirical Insights

Border issues constitute rhetorical resources available to right-wing populist actors to support their claims. They can be used to contextualise, highlight and legitimise various other issues and themes. RWPPs can use border issues to not only mobilise the border directly but also indirectly represent and reinforce the division between the in- and the out-group. The meaning given to the border can be linked to a broad field of various socio-political struggles connected to, among others, immigration, economy and globalisation. As they can serve to evoke symbolic and actual walls, border issues are among the tools at the disposal of right-wing populist discourse. In this section, I explore what kind of border issues were mobilised by the RWPPs located in the Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs, how their discourses on borders unfolded and whether there were similarities or differences between and within the two CBRs. What were the similarities and differences between the discourses of the RWPPs located in the two CBRs? Were there similar and

different patterns between and within the two CBRs regarding how RWPPs deal with borders?

Firstly, I expect that the RWPPs located in the two CBRs will not mobilise the border only in a direct way (i.e. by using direct border issues) but will also use it in connection with other themes to support their claims (i.e. indirect border issues). Secondly, since the right-wing populist discourse is context-dependent, I hypothesise that there will be some differences between and within the two CBRs. These differences could pertain to endogenous and exogenous factors, for instance, parties' ideological supply and organisational structures, the institutional, functional and structural dynamics of the two CBRs and the political and party systems in which the parties evolve.

As the discourse of the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and RN Haut-Rhin is mostly connected to the national level, one can expect a stronger mobilisation of direct border issues with the border as a physical entity to protect an endangered heartland. This expectation can be translated into the discourse of Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP as they mostly rely on the national scale. By contrast, the Geneva SVP and the MCG may be less likely to mobilise direct border issues as they mobilise a regional discourse and as the Greater Geneva CBR represents a model of strong functional integration, thus providing RWPPs with fewer opportunities to discursively shape the border as a direct and concrete entity because of the Geneva borderland's need for cross-border workers (particularly in the healthcare sector).

In the Tables provided in the following sections, each border issue is presented together with the number of coded segments and the percentage of coded segments, calculated based on the total of the documents in each borderland. The border issues common to the areas are indicated in bold. In the last column, I classified the issue as direct or indirect. Direct border issues refer to the border as a concrete artefact (e.g. in the case of border controls). In these cases, the border is a concrete and physical entity. Indirect border issues, by contrast, refer to the border indirectly: For instance, they relate to the loss of political sovereignty and economic power that entails consequences for the flow of people and goods or the identity of the country.

5.4.1. Right-Wing Populist Discursive Construction of Border Issues in the Greater Geneva Cross-Border Region

Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show the most-used border issues on the Swiss and French sides of the Greater Geneva CBR.

Table 5.2 – Most-used border issues in the Geneva borderland

Code	No of coded segments	Proportion of coded segments (%)	Type of border issue
European Union	56	13.27	Indirect
Unemployment	44	10.43	Indirect
Limitation initiative	36	8.53	Indirect
Economic crisis following the pandemic	28	6.64	Indirect
Hiring of local workers	23	5.45	Indirect
Migration as a threat to the economy	21	4.98	Indirect
Welfare state	20	4.74	Indirect
Border control	19	4.50	Direct
Criminality	13	3.08	Indirect
National sovereignty	13	3.08	Indirect

Note: The border issues common to the two borderlands are indicated in bold.

Table 5.3 – Most-used border issues in the Ain/Haute-Savoie borderland

Code	No of coded segments	Proportion of coded segments (%)	Type of border issue
European Union	33	16.2	Indirect
Border control	12	5.9	Direct
Protectionism	12	5.9	Indirect
National sovereignty	11	5.4	Indirect
Having open borders	10	4.9	Direct

Migration policies	10	4.9	Indirect
Origin of the virus: open borders	9	4.4	Direct
Globalisation	8	3.9	Indirect
PPE	8	3.9	Indirect
Closing borders	6	2.9	Direct

Note: The border issues common to the two borderlands are indicated in bold.

As for the similarities, in both cases, the European Union ranks among the most-used border issues. Criticism of the EU forms a strong part of the right-wing populist rhetoric on the alleged dangers of immigration – specifically regarding unemployment, the loss of sovereignty and cultural heritage – that result from the AFMP and the supranational decision-making of Brussels. Other common border issues relate to national sovereignty and border control. Broadly, these issues are closely linked to criticism of the EU and the free movement of persons. These are themes that have long been present in the discourse of the parties we are analysing. The crisis created by the pandemic is, for them, a sort of affirmation of their positions and a way to reinforce their demands.

With regard to the Geneva SVP and the MCG, the issue of the European Union is closely linked to the free movement of persons. Example 1 underlines how the Geneva SVP points to the free movement of persons as the cause of the canton's economic problems. In this context, the suggested solution involves limiting the hiring of foreign workers in favour of local workers. This example typically shows the combined use of the economic crisis following the pandemic, limitation initiatives, unemployment, hiring of local workers and EU issues. The excerpt is articulated around the national sovereignty issue as it stresses the need to "defend the interests of our country". By contrast, Example 2 demonstrates how the MCG implicitly criticises the free movement of persons for leading to wage dumping given the over-competition of the cross-border workforce in the Geneva borderland.

Example 1

The Covid-19 crisis and the resulting layoffs just remind us to what extent the economic situation is changing. The number of unemployed people is exploding in Switzerland and the European Union. It means that there are more job seekers for fewer jobs. In this respect, Geneva holds the sad Swiss record of a 5.2 per cent unemployment rate. It is the only canton that exceeds the 5 per cent threshold. Under these conditions, we believe, once again, that it is appropriate to favour the indigenous workforce rather than being the gutter

of EU employment (…). The limitation initiative will defend the interests of our country's workers and restrict the external workforce. When the time comes to choose, we have to ask ourselves the following question: "Can an EU worker replace me?" If the answer is yes, it is also the answer to put in the ballot box. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 28 August 2020)

Example 2

We've been through a unique health crisis (…). The over-competition of cross-border workers and the wage dumping suffered by SMEs remain our main concerns and compel us to intervene as strongly as possible. (MCG, Press blog, 29 August 2020)

Likewise, when it comes to the Ain/Haute-Savoie borderland, there is a strong focus on the EU as a common issue, albeit with a different focus. While on the Swiss side, the issue of the EU is strongly linked to the free movement of persons and employment concerns, it is extensively linked to migration policies and the supranational power of Brussels surpassing French decision-making on the French side. Example 3 shows how the RN criticises the supranational decision-making pertaining to migration policies and stresses the importance of (re)determining EU treaties. However, Example 4 underlines how the RN stands against the EU by criticising its bad management of the health crisis, as Brussels forbid the EU member states from closing their territorial borders during the pandemic in order to preserve the free movement of persons. This example typically involves the EU, the threat of open borders and the fact that the origins of the virus are tied to the politics of having open borders.

Example 3

A large part of what we experience on French soil is voted on and decided by Brussels. It is true for migration policies and for the quotas of migrants that are imposed. Brussels decides, and this has an impact on your daily lives. We must put these European treaties back on the table. (Valeurs actuelles – Repost, RN Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Facebook post, 4 August 2020)

Example 4

The EU has clearly been absent during the crisis. The first instructions it gave were harmful since they consisted in saying, "Don't take any measures to limit the free movement of people." Whatever the nature of the pandemic we are facing, and we have seen it with other pandemics in the past, whether it is human, vegetal or animal, the first thing to do is to prevent the virus from arriving and spreading on the territory. This is common sense! Well, the ideology of the EU was the opposite because it did not want to give up its free movement of persons dogma. (Marine Le Pen – Repost, RN Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Facebook post, 6 April 2020)

Regarding the common issue of national sovereignty, the Geneva SVP and the MCG use it to defend Genevan and Swiss workers against a cheaper EU labour workforce, as illustrated in Example 1. On the French side, the issue of national sovereignty is used by focusing specifically on the importance of bringing back national interests and criticising the government's decisions during the pandemic, as stressed in Example 5. Finally, regarding the common issue of border control, to the same extent as for the use of the EU issue, while the Geneva SVP and MCG promote stronger border controls to prevent the abusive use of welfare by immigrants and their contribution to the sharp rise in unemployment resulting from the free movement of persons (Examples 6 and 7), the RN promotes stronger border controls by undermining Brussels' decision-making and encouraging the restoration of sovereign nation-states (Example 8).

Example 5

The health crisis has given new meaning and legitimacy to words that our weak leader had excommunicated: "sovereignty", "borders", "strategic state" and "national interests". Behind these semantic signs of progress lies an ideological victory that will undoubtedly bring about political shifts. (Valeurs actuelles – Repost, RN Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Facebook post, 9 May 2020)

Example 6

The SVP is calling for stricter border controls. Even in prosperous economic times, 1 million people – mostly from the EU – have come to work or benefit from the social system in our small country over the past 13 years. As a result of the sharp rise in unemployment in all neighbouring countries, Switzerland will inevitably experience a further unstoppable influx of immigrants because of the free movement of persons – even though tens of thousands of Swiss are unemployed. In addition, poverty and social security contributions are expected to increase. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 28 May 2020)

Example 7

The MCG has never been against foreigners but believes that border controls are needed to protect the residents (Swiss citizens and foreigners). Through controlled immigration, the limitation initiative will allow full employment. (MCG, Official website article, 6 July 2020)

Example 8

I no longer expect something from the EU, whose only role in the crisis has been to warn countries against re-establishing border controls. This total failure of the EU is dramatic (…) We need to move towards free and sovereign nation-states as the EU doesn't defend the interests of the nations. (Jordan Bardella – Repost, RN Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Facebook post, 27 March 2020)

As for the differences, in the first place, we note that direct border issues are more used by the RN than the Geneva SVP and the MCG. For instance, the most prominent issues on the French side include a demand to close the border, the threat of open borders, the fact that the origins of the virus are tied to the politics of having open borders and the restoration of stronger border controls. These issues are closely linked to extensive indirect border issues such as globalisation, protectionism and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Example 9 shows how the RN combines the issues of PPE, the need to close the border and the origin of the virus associated with open borders by criticising the EU for allowing the borders to be open, which has contributed to the spread of the virus and the resulting consequences of relying on China for PPE. In turn, Example 10 demonstrates the use of the issues of globalisation and protectionism to implicitly restore national sovereignty. These issues are absent from the discourses provided by the Geneva SVP and the MCG.

Example 9

We have seen the EU slapping the fingers of some states as they wanted to close their borders to slow down the spread of the virus. The EU has done nothing, and we are now forced to implore China to deliver personal protective equipment to us. (Marine Le Pen – Repost, RN Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Facebook post, 6 April 2020)

Example 10

All the decisions taken since the health crisis show that they [the government] will not change, but that they will accelerate relocations and deindustrialisation. They will accelerate our dependence on foreign powers. The need to act is URGENT! (Marine Le Pen – Repost, RN Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Facebook post, 8 June 2020)

It seems that on the French side, and contrary to the Swiss side, the border is perceived as more of a real and concrete entity when direct border issues are used. On the one hand, the border is materially conceived as a tool protecting an organic territorial body from "the real or imagined contamination of alien bodies" (Minca et al. 2018: 87); this is done through an immunitarian perspective that portrays immigrants as vectors of disease. On the other hand, the border is seen (both materially and symbolically) as a tool to restore national sovereignty in opposition to Brussels' decision-making.

Conversely, in Geneva, migration is strongly promoted as a threat to the economy. As demonstrated in Example 6, the use of the topic of border control as a direct issue – the only direct border issue used on the Swiss side – relates to migration being considered a threat to the economy, which was already damaged by the pandemic, by using the issue of the

post-pandemic economic crisis. The so-called invasion by foreign workers is viewed as a threat in the context of the sharp rise in unemployment in Switzerland, and foreign workers are perceived as potentially overwhelming social assistance (Example 6). In this sense, stricter border control is meant to give Switzerland back its sovereignty by restraining an uncontrollable influx of immigrants.

Contrary to the French side of the border, the Europhile profile of the canton of Geneva and the need for cross-border healthcare workers during the pandemic seem to have provided political and contextual constraints on RWPPs to shape the border through direct border issues. That is why RWPPs on the Swiss side mostly used indirect border issues such as criminality, unemployment or the welfare state, which were, in turn, closely linked to the direct border issue of border controls. As shown in Example 11, criminality is typically used to underline how stricter border controls would diminish cross-border criminality, while the issue of sovereignty is used to show how enhanced national sovereignty and stronger border controls would protect Swiss workers in relation to security, employment and housing concerns (Example 12).

> **Example 11**
>
> Lockdown and stronger border controls have proved to be a winning formula for the Genevan people in terms of burglaries and thefts. We saw a drastic reduction in the number of burglaries (-40%) especially in flats and villas. Pickpocketing was also down by around 60% in March 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. The forced lockdown of Genevans does not explain everything. Indeed, the closure of borders has contributed to a decrease in crime. Cross-border crime in Geneva is significant. Year after year, Geneva is considered one of the cantons with the highest crime rate in Switzerland. (SVP Geneva, Party journal, 31 August 2020)

> **Example 12**
>
> The limitation initiative is crucial. The crisis has made this initiative meaningful. The Geneva SVP wants stronger border controls. We want to know who is entering and leaving our country. We have always defended security in general but also the security of employment and housing thanks to borders. (SVP Geneva, Facebook post, 4 May 2020)

To sum up, the RN was more prone to use direct border issues than the Geneva SVP and the MCG. While the RWPPs on the Swiss side mainly used border control as a direct border issue to highlight how stronger border controls would diminish criminality and protect Swiss and Genevan people against foreign EU workers, the border seems to have been perceived as the more real and concrete entity when extensive direct border issues were

utilised on the French side. Finally, when considering the common border issues, the Geneva SVP and the MCG tended to focus on the EU, national sovereignty and border control to prevent the invasion of immigrants and criticise the free movement of persons, while the RN tended to criticise the supranational decision-making of Brussels for undermining national sovereignty and exercising control over national borders.

5.4.2. Right-Wing Populist Discursive Construction of Border Issues in the Eurodistrict of Basel Cross-Border Region

Tables 5.4 and 5.5 present the most-used border issues on the Swiss and French sides of the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR.

Table 5.4 – Most-used border issues in the Basel borderland

Code	No of coded segments	Proportion of coded segments (%)	Type of border issue
Open borders	5	11.1	Direct
Limitation initiative	5	11.1	Indirect
Origin of the virus: open borders	4	8.9	Direct
Economic crisis following the pandemic	4	8.9	Indirect
Unemployment	4	8.9	Indirect
European Union	3	6.4	Indirect
Closing borders	2	4.4	Direct
Border control	2	4.4	Direct
Migration as a threat to economy	2	4.4	Indirect
Wage dumping	2	4.4	Indirect

Note: The border issues common to the two borderlands are indicated in bold.

Table 5.5 – Most-used border issues in the Haut-Rhin borderland

Code	No of coded segments	Proportion of coded segments (%)	Type of border issue
Protectionism	10	11.6	Indirect
European Union	7	8.1	Indirect
Border control	6	7.0	Direct
National sovereignty	6	7.0	Indirect
PPE	6	7.0	Indirect
Globalisation	4	4.7	Indirect
Economic crisis following the pandemic	3	3.5	Indirect
Having open borders	3	3.5	Direct
Migration policies	3	3.5	Indirect
Origin of the virus: open borders	2	2.3	Direct

Note: The border issues common to the two borderlands are indicated in bold.

As for the similarities, in both cases, direct border issues such as border control, the fact that the origins of the virus are tied to the politics of having open borders issues and the threat of open borders rank among the most-used border issues. Furthermore, the indirect border issues of the politicisation of the post-pandemic economic crisis and the EU are common to the Swiss and French sides of the border.

On the one hand, the Basel-Country SVP typically uses the origins of the virus by linking them to having open borders and to the unemployment and the economic crisis that followed the pandemic. They do this by stressing how immigrants from infected countries contribute to the rise in infections, which is damaging the economy and increasing unemployment in the country (Example 13). Besides, as shown in Example 14, the Basel-Country SVP makes use of the border control issue by ordering the Swiss executive to reintroduce border controls in order to stop the spread of the virus. On the other hand, the RN Haut-Rhin typically focuses on border control, the origins of the virus and the threat of open borders, along with other issues (e.g. globalisation, protectionism, the economic crisis following the pandemic and PPE), by stressing how the French government's bad management led to the spread of the virus (Example 15).

Example 13

Demonstrations with thousands of participants, illegal parties and arrivals from corona hotspots like Serbia are increasing the number of infections in Switzerland. The danger of a second wave increases daily. Owing to the billions in costs caused by the first wave, the huge economic damage, the tens of thousands unemployed and the hundreds of thousands of people in short-time work, a second wave would be a catastrophe for our economy, our society and our entire country. (SVP Basel-Country, Facebook post, 1 August 2020)

Example 14

The Federal Council must act immediately to protect the Swiss people (…) Systematic border controls and entry restrictions must be reintroduced with immediate effect. Furthermore, a two-week quarantine must be imposed on travellers from countries with high rates of coronavirus infections until it is certain they will not bring the virus. (SVP Basel-Country, Facebook post, 1 July 2020)

Example 15

The government is preparing to pass a self-amnesty law in the middle of a health crisis. The aim? To allow leaders to avoid being held legally liable for bad decisions taken in the face of the coronavirus crisis. Yet, it is the government that is responsible for the spread of the pandemic in the country. It is the government that refused to suspend flights from infected areas in January and allowed the virus to enter our country. It is the government that refused to control our national borders for purely ideological reasons. Even worse, it is the government that lied to the French people about the usefulness of wearing masks to hide the lack of sufficient stocks to meet the demands of health workers and law and order forces. Emmanuel Macron, his government, his decisions and the globalist model he has always defended are the only ones responsible for the crisis our country is going through. One day, they will have to answer to the French people, and this must be done through justice! (Rassemblement National – Repost, RN Haut-Rhin, Facebook post, 7 May 2020)

RWPPs in the Basel borderland strongly focus on employment concerns by using the issues of unemployment, limitation initiative, migration as a threat to the economy, wage dumping and the EU. Example 16 shows how the Basel-Country SVP encourages the passage of the limitation initiative to reduce the substitution of Swiss with cheaper EU workers and to reduce unemployment. By contrast, the EU issue is typically used by the RN in combination with national sovereignty and border control issues to undermine the role of the EU as a supranational power and stress the importance of managing border controls with the help of national sovereignty (Example 17). As such, while the EU is an issue common to the RWPPs on both sides of the border, they use it for different purposes.

Example 16

Immigrants are cheaper. There is clearly a threat to our old-age unemployed and poor job opportunities for our youths. It is of the utmost importance for the limitation initiative to be adopted in order to prevent our domestic labour force from being substituted by a cheap EU labour force, especially after the corona crisis. At this precise moment, we are facing a huge number of hundreds of thousands short-time workers. It is not possible that the cheap EU labour force substitute our people in Switzerland and contribute to lower wages. (Begrenzungsinitative.JA – Repost, SVP Basel-Country, Facebook post, 27 August 2020)

Example 17

We need to control our borders for two reasons: Firstly, because I have no confidence in Schengen as it is not an apparatus, nor even a treaty to protect our borders. It is a treaty to organise the free movement of people. Secondly, I think that we need to rely on our strengths and not on the EU as it has shown great weakness during the crisis. The countries in the EU have made very different choices in terms of strategy. For example, in Sweden, people are still hanging out in bars and restaurants. I think that we need to protect our borders, be able to know who is coming in our country and establish criteria on the arrival of people to avoid the lockdown being useless. (Marine Le Pen – Repost, RN Haut-Rhin, Facebook post, 12 April 2020)

As for the differences, while the RWPPs in the Basel borderland focus on the issue of closing the borders, with the Basel-City SVP stressing the need to close the country's borders with Italy at the beginning of the pandemic (Example 18), the RN in the Haut-Rhin borderland focuses on different issues such as protectionism, PPE, globalisation and migration policies. Example 19 shows how the RN makes use of the migration policy issue to stress how the influx of immigrants is damaging the healthcare system. Example 20 shows a discourse articulated around the issues of PPE, protectionism and globalisation to highlight how local textile industries could have been used instead of relying on China.

Example 18

Given the latest developments in the corona crisis, especially with concerns about the situation in Italy, the SVP parliamentary group in the Federal Parliament has called for the closure of the border with the neighbour to the south [Italy]. (SVP Schweiz – Repost, SVP Basel-City, Facebook post, 10 March 2020)

Example 19

When 400,000 immigrants enter our country every year, I would like to know how many hospitals have been built to care for all these people. If we don't build hospitals to care for them, there will be consequences at some point regarding the supply of health care to our compatriots. (Marine Le Pen – Repost, RN Haut-Rhin, Facebook post, 17 May 2020)

In the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR, it seems that the RWPPs in both the Swiss and French borderlands make use of the border as a real and concrete entity through direct border issues. By portraying immigrants as vectors of disease, they materially conceive the border as a tool protecting an organic territorial body from an immunitarian perspective (Minca et al. 2018). Furthermore, the RN uses the issue of border control in both material and symbolic ways in relation to the restoration of national sovereignty to counter the supranational decision-making of Brussels, while the RWPPs on the Swiss side use the issue of border control to further promote the border as a tool protecting the spread of the virus.

To sum up, RWPPs on both the Swiss and French sides of the border used direct border issues by materially conceiving the border as a tool protecting an organic territorial body. With respect to extensive common border issues, the Basel-Country and Basel-City branches of the SVP focused on the issues of the post-pandemic economic crisis and the EU by stressing how immigrants damage the economy and by opposing the substitution of Swiss people with cheaper EU workers to reduce unemployment. In turn, the RN focused on the same issues by undermining the role of the EU as a supranational decision-making power and by stressing how bad management by the French government led to a systemic and economic crisis.

5.4.3. Comparing the Discursive Construction of Right-Wing Populist Border Issues between the Two Cross-Border Regions

While the two previous sections explored the similarities and differences within both CBRs, this section will examine the similarities and differences in the discursive construction of border issues between the two CBRs. Figure 5.2 provides an overview of the distinct and common border issues used by the RWPPs in both CBRs and the distinct border issues used between RWPPs on the same side of the border in each country.

Figure 5.2 – Similarities and differences within and between the Greater Geneva and the Eurodistrict of Basel cross-border regions
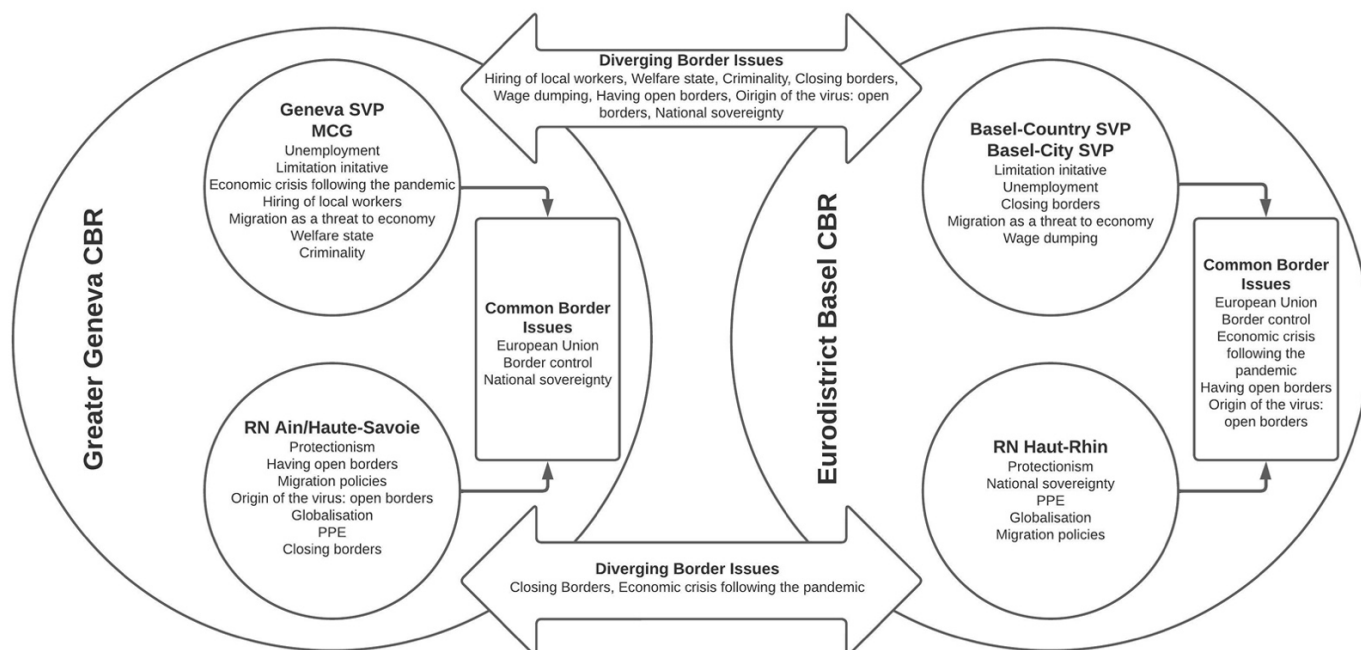
At first glance, there is a difference between the number of border issues the Geneva SVP, the MCG and the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie have in common (3) and how many are shared by the Basel-Country SVP, the Basel-City SVP and the RN Haut-Rhin (5). Furthermore, there is a greater discrepancy between the number of border issues on which the Geneva SVP and the MCG, on the one hand, and the Basel-Country SVP and Basel-City SVP, on the other hand, diverge (8) than the differences between the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and the RN Haut-Rhin (2).

With regard to the similarities in common border issues in both CBRs, all the RWPPs use the EU (as an indirect border issue) and border control (as a direct border issue). The RWPPs on the Swiss side similarly criticise the rise in unemployment induced by the free movement of persons (Examples 1 and 16) – specifically, the substitution of Swiss people with cheaper EU workers. At the same time, while the Geneva SVP and the MCG use the issue of border control to promote stronger border controls and prevent the abusive use of welfare by immigrants and the contribution of EU and cross-border workers to the sharp rise in unemployment resulting from the free movement of persons (Examples 6 and 7), as well as the usefulness of border controls in diminishing criminality (Example 11), the

Basel-Country and Basel-City SVP use the issue of border control to strengthen border controls and thereby stop the spread of the virus (Example 14). By contrast, the RWPPs on the French side criticise the EU and the supranational decision-making of Brussels for undermining national sovereignty (Examples 3 and 17). The RN Ain/Haute-Savoie stresses the need to restore border controls to defend national interests (Example 8), and the RN Haut-Rhin uses the issue of border control to prevent the spread of the virus (Example 15).

Regarding the differences between both CBRs on common border issues in each CBR, the RWPPs in the Greater Geneva CBR underscore the issue of national sovereignty by defending Swiss and Genevan workers against cheaper EU workers (Geneva SVP and MCG; Example 1) and by promoting the usefulness of bringing back national interests during the pandemic (RN Ain/Haute-Savoie; Example 5). By contrast, RWPPs in the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR focus on the economic crisis following the pandemic, the threat of open borders and the fact that the origins of the virus are tied to the politics of having open borders. In this vein, while the Basel-Country and Basel-City focus on these issues by stressing how immigrants from infected countries contribute to a rise in the number of infections, which damages the economy and increases unemployment in the country (Example 13), the RN Haut-Rhin stresses how the French government's bad management led to the spread of the virus and to a systemic crisis (Example 15).

Regarding the RWPPs on the same side of the border in each country, there seems to be a greater discrepancy regarding the use of border issues between the Geneva SVP and the MCG, on the one hand, and the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP, on the other hand. While all of them focus on the issues of unemployment, the limitation initiative, the economic crisis following the pandemic, migration as a threat to economy, the EU and border control to the same extent, they strongly diverge in terms of the use of hiring local workers, welfare state, criminality, the need to close borders, wage dumping, the threat of having open borders, the fact that the origins of the virus are tied to the politics of having open borders and national sovereignty. Against this background, the Geneva SVP and the MCG seldom focus on direct border issues and tend to make more use of the issues of local workers, the welfare state, criminality and national sovereignty by expressing, in turn, the need to hire local workers and restore national sovereignty (Examples 1 and 2), the abusive use of social assistance by immigrants (Example 6) and the declining crime rates with the return of stronger border control (Example 11). By contrast, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP strongly focus on direct border issues by using the closing of borders, the

threat of open borders and the fact that the origins of the virus are tied to the politics of having open borders and making extensive use of the indirect border issue of wage dumping. Regarding the use of the wage dumping issue, the RWPPs in Basel criticise the lowering of wages induced by the hiring of cheaper EU workers. With respect to the use of direct border issues, and in contrast with the Geneva SVP and the MCG, the border is materially conceived from an immunitarian perspective (Minca et al. 2018), as a tool protecting an organic territorial body, by portraying immigrants as vectors of disease. Moreover, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP use the direct border issues to stress how immigrants from infected countries contributed to the rise in infections and how border controls would be necessary to stop the spread of the virus (Examples 13 and 14).

There appears to be a strong convergence of the issues used by the RN branches in Ain/Haute-Savoie and the Haut-Rhin. In the same way and to the same degree, the RWPPs focus on the issues of protectionism, the threat of open borders, migration policies, the fact that the origins of the virus are tied to the politics of having open borders, PPE, the EU, border control and national sovereignty. The only divergences can be found in the parties' use of closing the borders and the economic crisis that followed the pandemic. In this vein, while the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie focuses on the issue of closing the borders by stressing the need to close borders to slow down the spread of the virus (Example 9), the RN Haut-Rhin focuses on the economic crisis following the pandemic by expressing how bad management by the French government led to a systemic and economic crisis (Example 15). Contrary to the RWPPs on the Swiss side, these divergences are not radically different when comparing the discourses of both the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and Haut-Rhin, meaning that the discursive construction of border issues appears to be homogeneous on the French side and heterogeneous on the Swiss side.

In conclusion, the remaining question is how to explain such differences between both CBRs and between the French and Swiss sides of the border when comparing the border issues used by French and Swiss RWPPs. The explanations are threefold and could relate to endogenous and exogenous contextual factors. Firstly, as the RN is characterised by strong centralisation at the national level, the party's discourse remains articulated around national issues (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018), which explains the homogeneous construction of border issues between the sub-state sections of the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and the RN Haut-Rhin. Secondly, it was argued in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4) that the sub-state cantonal branches of the SVP enjoy a significant measure of autonomy at the regional level

(Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016) and that the party oscillates between state-wide centralisation and sub-state decentralisation. As such, while the Geneva SVP provides a discourse that is regionally anchored (to the same extent as the MCG), the Basel-City and Basel-Country branches of the SVP rely mostly on the discourse of the national SVP. This could explain the heterogeneous construction that is observable between the Geneva and Basel borderlands and the strong focus on direct border issues for the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP, whose origins can be found in the national perspective. The explanation for the Basel-City and the Basel-Country SVP using the national SVP's discourse could be the strong legacy of regional institutionalisation in the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR, which could undermine the opportunities for RWPPs in the Basel borderland to discursively focus on regional controversies (see also Chapter 7), and to the distinct ideological supply, or ideological agendas, they provide.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to explore how several RWPPs discursively shape borders and, in particular, what kind of border issues are observable in the discourse of parties operating in CBRs at a time of crisis. To analyse the discursive construction of border issues by RWPPs, I used the context of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in two European CBRs and asked how RWPPs acted as "entrepreneurs" by using border issues as rhetorical resources to support their claims. As discourse is closely intertwined with contextual factors, I also looked for similarities and differences between and within the two CBRs.

Firstly, I defined border issues as issues that deal directly or indirectly with the border. Thus, border issues not only deal directly with the border intended as a physical device to divide two nation-states, as in the case of border control and patrols, but can also function as a symbolic and identity device that essentialises the nation-state as an imagined community linked to specific identities and protects it against alleged dangers (Anderson 2006; Casaglia 2020; Wodak 2021b).

Secondly, I analysed and compared the discourses of electorally successful RWPPs acting in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs sharing similarities and differences. The two CBRs areas are similar regarding the high influx of cross-border workers and the

impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there are also some differences regarding the patterns of cross-border integration: As argued in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), while both CBRs are characterised by a strong and functional cross-border interdependence, the Greater Geneva CBR appears to be less institutionalised than the Eurodistrict of Basel with respect to the diverging cross-border integration policies at stake (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009).

On the one hand, the results show that RWPPs shape borders directly and indirectly. They use re-bordering narratives to advocate the border as a concrete tool of defence against "others". Moreover, through indirect issues, RWPPs discursively shape the border to position themselves on issues that go beyond the border as a concrete entity, ranging from immigration, national sovereignty and protectionism to the agreement on the free movement of persons.

As expected, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP and the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and RN Haut-Rhin were more likely to shape the border as a direct issue. Thus, the border has been perceived as an objective territorial line providing defence against contagious alien bodies from an immunitarian imperative (Minca et al. 2018). Alien bodies are used as scapegoats to legitimise the closure of state borders through direct border issues (Radil, Castan Pinos, and Ptak 2021). The border is perceived as a wall against contagious intruders. At the same time, the construction of direct border issues can be linked to national sovereignty and the undermining of EU decision-making in the RN discourse. By contrast, RWPPs in the Geneva borderland framed the border as a concrete artefact to a lesser extent. They only did so by promoting stricter border control to restore sovereignty in the management of immigration, fight unemployment, protect the welfare state and reduce cross-border criminality.

On the other hand, results show similarities and differences between and within CBRs. For instance, in the Greater Geneva CBR, the border issues used by the Geneva SVP and the MCG were strongly linked to concerns over employment, with the free movement of persons seen as threatening to an economy already damaged by the pandemic and increasing the unemployment rate. As stated in the previous paragraph, the issue of border control was also used to legitimise the benefits of reducing criminality and protecting Swiss and Genevan workers. Regarding the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie, border issues were rather used to promote restoring national sovereignty and undermining EU decision-making. Furthermore, the party extensively used direct border issues with the border perceived as a concrete and

physical entity to support their claims. In the Eurodistrict of Basel CBR, the border issues used by the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP were linked to employment concerns, with immigrants seen as damaging the economy, increasing the unemployment rate and causing Swiss people to be substituted with cheaper EU workers. At the same time, and contrary to the Geneva SVP and the MCG, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP made extensive use of direct border issues by promoting the border as a tool to prevent the invasion of contagious people. Besides legitimising the border as a tool to protect against infections from foreigners, the RN Haut-Rhin also used direct border issues by criticising the government's bad management of the crisis and undermining the role of the EU as a supranational power.

Therefore, while the RN discourse between both CBRs appears to be homogeneous, there is a greater discrepancy between RWPPs in the different CBRs on the Swiss side. This could be explained by the nationalisation and centralisation of the RN discourse, which leads to a certain amount of homogeneity between different geographical spaces. Furthermore, the differences between the Geneva SVP and the MCG, on the one hand, and the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP, on the other hand, could be explained by the articulation of regional *versus* national discourses. This leads to two considerations: Firstly, as the Eurodistrict of Basel is one of the best examples of cross-border integration in the world, there seem to be no opportunities for RWPPs in the Basel borderland to discursively shape regional grievances on border issues. By contrast, the less institutionalised profile of the Geneva borderland, coupled with asymmetrical socio-economic developments on both sides of the border, presents RWPPs with opportunities to discursively shape and focus on such regional grievances while simultaneously restricting the use of direct border issues. This is because the border represents a resource for cross-border employment, including in the healthcare sector, which seems to constrain the right-wing populist discursive construction of the border as a physical device to protect people. Instead, the discourse is based on indirect issues to legitimise the restriction of access on the Genevan and Swiss territorial spaces to foreign (i.e. EU and cross-border) workers. And secondly, these differences could pertain to the distinct ideological supply, or ideological agendas, they provide, as the Basel-City and Basel-Country seem to focus on national issues, while the Geneva SVP and the MCG focus on regional issues (see Chapter 7 for more on this topic).

In conclusion, this chapter contributes to the understanding of the relationship between right-wing populism and borders in three ways. Firstly, it conceptualised direct and indirect

border issues and proved that (in the cases considered) RWPPs shape the border in both direct and indirect ways by portraying it as a tool of symbolic and concrete defence against external threats. Secondly, this chapter showed that the emergence of the pandemic crisis fits into the long-term integration processes of European CBRs. These processes have taken various forms and have had an impact on the different ways in which RWPPs discursively shape the borders in the two CBRs. The pandemic context appears to have seemingly reinforced the positions of RWPPs on issues that have long been present in their discourse (e.g. the European Union, unemployment, economic crisis, national sovereignty and protectionism). The partial closure of state borders during the pandemic further seems to have strengthened spatial aspects of identity and the normative justification of borders and provided a basis for legitimising a re-bordering discourse. This discourse seeks to make the border a symbol of either a wall or a way of defending the local population against "others". Finally, this chapter outlined the strong context-dependency of the right-wing populist discourse in relation to exogenous and endogenous factors, such as parties' ideological supply and organisational structures, the institutional, functional and structural dynamics of the CBRs and the political and party systems in which parties evolve to shape territorialised discursive practices.

6. Bordering Narratives: Exploring Argumentation Strategies in the Geneva Borderland during the Covid-19 Pandemic

This chapter investigates how right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) in the Geneva borderland discursively shape borders through an examination of the various bordering narratives in their discourses. The goal of this chapter is to provide insight into the discursive construction of the border in RWPPs' discourses on migration and borders amid a crisis context that allows them to dramatise external threats (Brubaker 2017).

As shown in the theoretical chapter (Chapter 2), there is a consensus in the literature that RWPPs tend to frame nativist and conservative values that support an exclusionary vision of the nation (and the national identity) based on ethnonationalism and xenophobia (Betz 1994; Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Rydgren 2018; Zaid and Joshi 2018). But how do these parties position themselves against immigration, and which argumentation strategies do they use? While scholars have explored these questions (among others, see Krzyżanowski 2020; Wodak et al. 2013), this chapter specifically examines the right-wing populist discourse on immigration and borders in a borderland during the Covid-19 pandemic, when stronger border controls gave RWPPs the chance to address migration and border issues (Bobba and Hubé 2021).

A specific symbolisation – i.e. the contextual meaning or mental image that is given to an object (Chandler 2002) – of the border is inherent in any right-wing populist discourse: This symbolisation clearly distinguishes between the inside and the outside – "us" and "them" – and makes it possible for RWPPs to imagine the nation as a symbol of sovereignty by relying on notions such as protection, control and differentiation (Hamman 2013). This normative perspective allows RWPPs to conceptualise territorial borders as objects regulating political, social and economic activities (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999). In line with Newman (2006), the construction of borders is an ongoing and dynamic process that shapes categories of differentiation and separation. Accordingly, the narratives produced by RWPPs represent strategic sites for the construction and negotiation of politically expedient

identities (De Fina 2017). Against this backdrop, I regard bordering narratives as a set of discourse used by RWPPs to construct socio-political issues as an aspect of everyday life in relation to migration and border issues.

This chapter addresses three research questions: Which bordering narratives are present in the anti-immigration and border discourse of RWPPs operating in the Geneva borderland during the Covid-19 pandemic? How did the bordering narratives evolve during the different phases of the pandemic (i.e. before, during and after the partial closure of state borders)? And what are the similarities and differences in how the Geneva SVP and the MCG discursively shape bordering narratives? While some previous studies have highlighted the ambivalent discourse of RWPPs regarding bordering narratives (Biancalana and Mazzoleni 2020; Lamour and Varga 2020; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017), I explore whether this ambivalence applies to the temporal and spatial context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In these studies, the border is conceptualised as an ambivalent discursive resource used by RWPPs to promote either the opening or the closing of state borders, depending on contextual opportunities and constraints. In the former case, the border corresponds to a space of exchange and integration (de-bordering narrative), while in the latter, it is seen as a barrier to prevent immigration and cross-border movements (re-bordering narrative). The aim of the chapter is to gain a better understanding of how RWPPs discursively legitimise borders and anti-immigration stances. This will be achieved by exploring the bordering narratives that they promote and the argumentation strategies that they provide.

From a spatial point of view, focusing on the Geneva borderland is of particular interest since the region has the highest influx of cross-border workers in Switzerland. As shown in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), the Geneva borderland is part of the Greater Geneva cross-border region (CBR), which is characterised by a strong functional integration due to the substantial transborder mobility of people, goods, capital and services. Consequently, it represents a fertile ground for RWPPs to engage with issues such as immigration and borders. For instance, despite the strong functional form of cross-border cooperation between the Geneva borderland and the other side of the border, the strong economic differentials between Switzerland and France and the resulting increase in the number of French cross-border workers in Geneva generate high levels of hate and resentment within the Swiss population (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Sohn 2020). Finally, the

canton of Geneva has a long-standing legacy of right-wing populist politicisation with respect to immigration and border issues (D'Amato and Skenderovic 2009).

From a temporal point of view, the Covid-19 pandemic crisis offered RWPPs a major opportunity to mobilise against transnational flows and in favour of spatial aspects of identity (Biancalana, Heinisch, and Mazzoleni 2021; Bobba and Hubé 2021; Casaglia et al. 2020). In this regard, the pandemic served as a context-specific break by generating instability and uncertainty from economic, political, social and cultural points of view (Hay 1999). This context greatly influenced border-related issues, with the partial closure of state borders and the resulting resurgence of border controls. It also led to a re-legitimisation of borders through mental re-bordering processes linked to lockdowns and, more generally, isolation (Usher et al. 2020). Accordingly, I expect that these specific spatial and temporal contexts are prone to foster a radicalised right-wing populist re-bordering narrative (i.e. a discourse focused on the border's function as a barrier and on a radicalised exclusion of immigrants).

In this chapter, I explore the bordering narratives by investigating the argumentation strategies that RWPPs use to frame the political inclusion and exclusion of certain categories of people. In this context, the argumentation strategies – that is, the topoi and their related topics – represent important linguistic and rhetorical analytical tools that the discourse historical approach (DHA) makes available in order to investigate RWPPs' discursive construction of bordering narratives. On the one hand, topoi represent rhetorical tools used to justify political inclusion or exclusion. On the other hand, the topics summarise the most important themes in a discourse (or what a discourse is about). Accordingly, this chapter aims to understand how RWPPs discursively legitimise borders and anti-immigration stances and which argumentation schemes they provide. To this end, I collected 181 articles from heterogeneous sources published between 1 January and 31 August 2020, including the parties' Facebook posts, official party newspapers and official party releases. The corpus comprises discourses produced by the two RWPPs in the Geneva borderland, namely the sub-state cantonal branch of the Geneva Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP) and the Geneva Citizens' Movement (Mouvement Citoyens Genevois, MCG).

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 1 focuses on the relationship between right-wing populist discourse and bordering narratives. By considering the border-migration nexus, this section shows how RWPPs use borders to frame migration issues and *vice-versa*. Section 2 deals with the context in which the discourses have been produced. Section 3

section gives insights into the research methodology. Section 4 compares the most relevant argumentation strategies of the RWPPs. Finally, section 5 offers some concluding remarks on the results of the empirical analysis.

6.1. Right-Wing Populism and Bordering Narratives: Reflecting on the Border–Migration Nexus

To better grasp the concept of bordering narratives as they relate to the right-wing populist anti-immigration and border discourse, it is necessary to reflect on the intertwined relationship between borders and migration, among others through the process of differential inclusion and the essentialisation of a normative understanding of borders as a tool of defence. As RWPPs normatively conceptualise borders as regulating political, social and economic activities (e.g. relating to migration), bordering narratives are useful to understand the right-wing populist negotiation of politically expedient identities.

Historically, the political use of borders has undergone significant changes over time. As Popescu (2012) highlights, well-documented borders during antiquity, such as the Roman *limes* or the Chinese Great Wall, had different meanings than the ones ascribed to them today. Indeed, borders did not necessarily coincide with tools of defence but also with open spaces for activities such as trade and exchanges. While borders were also erected to protect resources against "barbarians" and to control trade, they were not meant to delineate sovereignties, that is, to delimit exclusive authorities over territories. Later, during the medieval era, borders were not used to control territories *per se*, as authorities were organised in a functional rather than a territorial way (i.e. relating to allegiances to some rulers such as kings, bishops, dukes and lords). Borders were considered more as fluid zones than as fixed entities. It was only in the 13th and 14th centuries that fixed state borders began to acquire more importance in shaping political authority and exclusive territories within Western Europe. As further elaborated by Jones (2016), it was especially during the 20th century that new systems of passports and visas emerged and resulted in the restriction and control of migratory movements.

As outlined in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), the Peace of Westphalia represented a turning point in the conception of borders, establishing the idea of fixed territorial lines and nation-states as the main political, social and economic entities (among others, see Agnew 2008; Laine 2016). Since then, borders have been increasingly used to delineate a spatialised and territorialised understanding of sovereignty. This is where borders and migration became intertwined in a magnetic nexus. Borders were materially and discursively represented as tools for territorial control and power in a form of securitisation (Léonard 2010). According to Rheindorf and Wodak (2018: 22), securitisation occurs when "an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object – that is, the state, incorporating government, territory and society". In the case of immigration issues, as argued by Schain (2019: 18), the securitisation process relates to the perception of immigrants as a threat to internal security and identity:

> At least for the last decade, Western governments have linked immigration policy to issues of internal (criminality) and external security. By focusing on immigrants as a challenge to internal security and identity, and as a danger to the general security of the state, more mundane socioeconomic problems can be merged with existential threats.

In this context, borders serve as tools to both allow and restrict transnational flows and perpetuate inequalities by reinforcing logics of inclusion and exclusion (Deleixhe, Dembinska and Iglesias 2019). Because of the fear of losing control, nation-states have developed policies to either select or restrict migratory movements to their own territories, depending on the context (Anderson 2013; Vollmer 2014). In response to the challenge that migratory movements pose to the legal and political consensus, nation-states have created new regimes of migration control to preserve their identity and belonging (Rheindorf and Wodak 2020). Casas-Cortes et al. (2015: 15) argue that migration is a defining force in the production of the categorical function of borders through the process of selective or differential inclusion:

> Migration is a co-constituent of the border as a site of conflict and as a political space. It is the excess of these forces and movements of migration that challenge, cross, and reshape borders, and it is this generative excess that is subsequently stabilized, controlled, and managed by various state agencies and policy schemes as they seek to invoke the border as a stable, controllable and manageable tool of selective or differential inclusion.

The process of differential inclusion, which involves differentiated treatment for some categories of people, leads to the classification of some categories of migrants into those who may receive permission to enter and those who are excluded based on where they come from and what they represent (Bellier 2011). This is explicitly translated into the concept of a moralisation of bordering, which I defined in the theoretical chapter (Chapter 2) as the exclusion of a group of people through a narrative of deservingness that RWPPs deploy, namely "following the principle that some people do not deserve to be treated equally or in the way we (the host society) treat human beings" (Vollmer 2017a: 4).

In this context, RWPPs consider migration as a challenge to internal security and identity, and borders act as essential resources for these parties to deal with issues such as securitisation and the alleged dangers of immigrants based on the fear of strangers and the loss of identity (Demata 2022; Schain 2019). As asserted by Casaglia and Coletti (2021: 4), "this specific use of the nation's bounded space becomes a mantra when it begins to face real or crafted emergencies" (e.g. in the case of migration). In this regard, borders play a fundamental role in re-enacting an idealised heartland by legitimising borders to recover territorial sovereignty and excluding immigrants:

> They [RWPPs] propose securitization and policing to reduce migration flows. They recommend laws to discriminate or exclude foreigners from becoming citizens, residents or from using public services based on negative moral considerations and on the assumption that some migrants are suspected of damaging the traditional ways of life and upsetting social balances. (Osuna 2022: 17)

As exposed in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), in a Manichean outlook, RWPPs favour a homogeneous and undifferentiated national, cultural and economic community excluding those who do not belong to it, like in the case of migrants (Deiwiks 2009; Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2014; Taguieff 1995). This essentialisation of a homogeneous community is favoured by borders playing a fundamental role in this process, as the essentialisation of the nation-state favours a normative vision of the border, which is perceived as a tool of defence for RWPPs and serves practical purposes relating to the protection of the territory against enemies, the control of incoming flows of people, and the differentiation between the in- and out-group (or inside and outside) (Hamman 2013). Thus, borders become key discursive icons – for instance, aimed at controlling migration (Vollmer 2017b).

As a result, borders are considered dividing lines linked to state-centred nations and ethnocultural areas (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999; Balibar 2002). This separation between the inside and the outside contributes to normalising borders' categorical functions of managing and regulating migration:

> Borders have often signified a more or less sharp division between here and there, inside and outside, us and them and they have served as a seemingly simple tool for demarcation and control. Even in Western Europe and North America, where boundaries are generally relatively weakly contested and (especially in Europe) are supposed to gradually fade from within, the birder retains a clear and categorical function for the management of movement and regulation of migration. (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015: 13)

At the same time, the role of borders in the reproduction of bounded and reified territorial spaces cannot be reduced to the national scale (Konrad et al. 2018; Sassen 2006). Indeed, the idea of territorial sovereignty is not automatically and merely equated with the nation *per se* but instead unfolds simultaneously below and beyond nation-state boundaries (Casaglia et al. 2020; Mountz 2013). Therefore, the rescaling of political mobilisation through different scales – promoted, among others, by supranational integration and globalisation – highlights the multi-scalar construction of borders that are constantly negotiated and reconfigured by actors at various scales (Laine 2016; Mazzoleni 2017; Perkmann and Sum 2002). Several scholars have demonstrated that RWPPs provide ambivalent discourses on borders in this context. These discourses oscillate between de-bordering and re-bordering narratives at various territorial scales (Biancalana and Mazzoleni, 2020; Lamour and Varga, 2020; Mazzoleni and Mueller, 2017). While the former define the loss of state borders' structuring capacity (Paasi, 2002), the latter define the re-emergence of the border's function as a barrier (Häkli, 2008).

To understand the complexity of RWPPs' discursive construction of borders, I use the concept of bordering narratives. As shown in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), and as argued by Scott (2015: 31), the concept of bordering illustrates "the everyday construction of a border, for example through political discourses and institutions, media representations, school textbooks, stereotypes and everyday forms of transnationalism". At the same time, De Fina (2017) defines narratives as a set of discourse used to construct socio-political issues as an aspect of everyday life – among others, in the construction of in- and out-groups. From this perspective, politicians can use narratives "to deal with their particular experiences as an integral to social experiences, as instances of social problems and as

windows into their understanding of socio-political processes" (De Fina 2017: 240). Forchtner (2021) delineates narratives as explaining the "what" and the formation of discourses that thematically and structurally depend on the context in which they are performed. Thus, I define bordering narratives as RWPPs' context-dependent discursive construction of borders to defend their political interests by shaping socio-political issues relating to borders and migration according to their understanding and articulation of various social problems. In this context, borders can be shaped as discursive resources to promote, depending on contextual opportunities and constraints, either the opening or the closing of state borders. In the former case, the border corresponds to a space of exchange and integration (de-bordering narrative), while in the latter, it is seen as a barrier to prevent immigration and cross-border movements (re-bordering narrative). Furthermore, these bordering narratives can be materially or symbolically framed by considering borders either as tangible objects of control (e.g. walls, border control) or by having processes that include or exclude specific categories of people and are helped by the fluidity of the construction of "us" and "them".

6.2. Contextual Dimensions: The Geneva Borderland and the Covid-19 Pandemic

As part of the Greater Geneva CBR, the Geneva borderland is a significant case study because it exhibits strong functional integration with the other side of the border. As shown in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), Geneva has a higher share of cross-border workers than any other canton in Switzerland: 27 per cent of the total cross-border flow, representing 100,445 cross-border workers during the second quarter of 2022 (see Figure 4.9). Despite strong cross-border cooperation between the Geneva borderland and the other side of the border, the strong economic differentials between Switzerland and France have generated high levels of hate and resentment among the Swiss population due to the increase in the number of cross-border workers in Geneva (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Sohn 2020).

The application of the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP) in Switzerland is especially relevant for the canton of Geneva, whose higher wages (compared

with those on the other side of the border) attract many French cross-border workers. The two main fields in which French cross-border workers are employed are the healthcare and social sectors. In 2020, 13 per cent of French cross-border workers had a job in one of these two sectors (OCSTAT 2020). Moreover, at the end of 2017, 63 per cent of the entire medical corps of the Geneva University Hospitals (HUG) consisted of cross-border workers from France (OTPS 2019). This demonstrates the strong and functional form of cross-border integration and the high degree of socioeconomic interdependence between the two sides of the border (Sohn et al. 2009).

As demonstrated in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), two RWPPs operate in the canton of Geneva: the sub-state cantonal branch of the Geneva SVP and the MCG. While the Geneva SVP is a relatively weak party on the Genevan political landscape, the MCG was the second-most influential political party behind the FDP in 2013. However, it faced a significant drop in support in 2018 and 2023. At the same time, these parties could ally and represent around 17 per cent of the cantonal parliament in 2018 and around 22 per cent in 2023, indicating that they remain a substantial political force in the canton (see Figure 4.2). Notably, both RWPPs focus on regional grievances and prioritise local employees over cross-border workers.

This is not the first time the canton of Geneva has had popular RWPPs. Between the 1960s and 1990s, an RWPP called Vigilance successfully operated in the canton and was active on issues such as the regulation of immigration and the fight against over-foreignisation (D'Amato and Skenderovic 2009). Today, the canton faces high rates of unemployment and immigration, a lack of accommodation, an increase in rent, traffic congestion and the number of cross-border workers. All of these are issues that RWPPs typically use to blame immigrants and cross-border workers for social, political, economic and cultural problems.

The canton of Geneva is highly internationalised and has a Europhile profile (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020) that is corroborated by the rejection rates of SVP national popular initiatives among Genevan voters: the rejection of the 2009 Swiss minaret referendum by 50.7 per cent of voters, the rejection of the 2010 popular initiative to deport foreign criminals by 55.7 per cent of the electorate and the rejection of the 2014 Swiss immigration initiative by 60.9 per cent of Geneva's population. At the same time, the MCG's 2014 regional initiative to refuse co-financing of parking facilities on the French side of the border was approved by a majority of 51.1 per cent of Genevan voters. This clearly shows the limits of the internationalised and Europhile profile of the Geneva canton

when it comes to regional cross-border grievances (Sohn 2020) and suggests that the Geneva borderland could make a thrilling case study to explore the opportunities and constraints – fuelled by the Covid-19 pandemic – offered to the Geneva SVP and the MCG to legitimise a radicalised re-bordering narrative.

As argued in the previous empirical chapter (Chapter 5), I focus on the Covid-19 pandemic as this context provided RWPPs with new opportunities to criticise external threats and reinforce spatial aspects of identity (Casaglia et al. 2020). Importantly, RWPPs benefitted from the pandemic context by taking a stand against open borders, excluding immigrants and criticising the EU's supranational decision-making with regard to the management of the crisis (Biancalana, Heinisch, and Mazzoleni 2021; Wondreys and Mudde 2022).

In Switzerland, state borders were partially closed from 13 March to 15 June 2020, except for the necessary cross-border workforce with work permits (e.g. cross-border workers in the healthcare sector), which greatly influenced border-related issues by (re)legitimising borders as objects of control. Moreover, and as argued in Chapter 5, this period has been crucial in relation to a popular initiative (i.e. the "limitation" initiative) launched by the national SVP to end the AFMP. In this regard, the pandemic and the resulting partial closure of state borders represented a substantial opportunity for the Geneva SVP and the MCG to argue in favour of the initiative by using the closure of state borders to support their claims of protection. On 27 September 2020, the initiative was rejected by 61.7 per cent of Swiss voters. In line with the internationalised and Europhile profile of the canton of Geneva, 69 per cent of its voters rejected the initiative.

6.3. Methodology: Investigating Argumentation Strategies

This chapter aims to focus on the argumentation strategies (i.e. the topoi and their related topics) as important linguistic means to investigate RWPPs' discursive construction of bordering narratives. As argued in the methodological chapter (Chapter 3), on the one hand, *topoi* are used to investigate the justification of positive or negative attributions by examining the transition from arguments to the conclusion. As such, topoi are part of the argumentation schemes used to justify political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or

preferential treatment by asking the following question: By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify and legitimate the exclusion, suppression and exploitation of others? (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Wodak 2001a). On the other hand, the topoi are related to specific topics summarising the most important themes in a discourse (or what a discourse is about) (Van Dijk 1991). The combinations of topics and topoi shape the argumentation strategies that RWPPs can use to discursively shape bordering narratives relating to migration and border issues.[21]

Against this background, the linguistic aim of this chapter is to explore discourses' argumentation strategies regarding RWPPs' discursive construction of bordering narratives. Concretely, bordering narratives can be investigated through the argumentation strategies used by RWPPs to frame political inclusion and exclusion. These strategies help RWPPs to warrant the inclusion or exclusion of some categories of people by symbolically and materially legitimising the border as either a wall or a gate. Thus, the scope is to understand how RWPPs discursively legitimise borders and which argumentation strategies they provide.

The discourses that I collected focus on direct party communication. I gathered data from 1 January to 31 August 2020 and used three parties' direct communication channels, namely official Facebook posts, articles taken by the official party newspapers and official party releases, as sources for the analysis (see Table 6.1).

For this timespan, I selected texts that focused on migration and border issues: texts with at least one direct reference to migration (e.g. criticising cross-border workers, economic/criminal migrants, agreements related to migration) or the border (e.g. border portrayed as being too porous to combat Covid-19, the need to reinforce border controls for more security) were collected. Discourses relating to borders are integrated because they are closely intertwined with migration issues (see the theoretical framework of this chapter). With these criteria, a total of 181 texts were selected (see Table 6.1).

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[21] The topics used in this chapter serve as the same discourse-analytical tools as in Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, the topics were used in relation to the concept of border issues to better understand how RWWPs contribute to shaping border-related public issues that need to be addressed. Here, the topics are used to analytically explore the issues around which the topoi are linked. As mentioned, the combination of topics and topoi defines the argumentation strategies at stake in the discourses.

Table 6.1 – Number of analysed documents and sources

Party	Number of documents (Total = 181)	Sources
Geneva SVP	150	Edition spéciale de l'UDC Genève (official party newspaper) (10); Facebook posts (UDC Genève) (140)
MCG	31	Le Citoyen (official party newspaper) (4); official party releases (www.mcge.ch and www.tdg.ch/les-blogs) (8); Facebook posts (MCG Officiel) (19)

The selected texts were coded and analysed with the help of the MAXQDA software, which has been used to inductively identify the combination of topics and topoi at stake in the texts. The software was used to code each segment of text containing argumentation strategies relating to immigration and border issues. Each segment could be coded with more than one topic and one topos. The first inductive coding was completed and subsequently controlled with a second reading of the data. I used the coding functionality and the code relation browser of MAXQDA (see Chapter 3), firstly to map the topics and related topoi shaping the argumentation strategies used to shape borders and migration issues, and secondly to explore the most prominent (or most-used) combinations (or co-occurrences) of topics and topoi in the texts. The topics and topoi resulting from the inductive coding of the data are presented in Tables 6.2 and 6.3.

Table 6.2 – List of topics

Topic	Example
Environment	Biodiversity is harmed because of massive immigration
Security	Security must be increased by closing the borders to prevent crimes by immigrants
Health	Immigrants bring disease (e.g. Covid-19)
Criminality	Immigrants are burglars who steal
Housing/infrastructure	Accommodation becomes less available and more expensive because of the massive influx of immigrants

Sovereignty	There is a need to re-establish sovereignty by lowering immigration
Agreements	Among others, agreements granting the free movement of people lead to massive immigration
Permissiveness	Despite the burden of immigration, Switzerland accepts too many people onto its territory
Taxation	Immigrants are responsible for high taxation, due to their social assistance costs
Employment	Immigrants are taking jobs that should go to the native population

Table 6.3 – List of topoi

Topos	Warrant
Burden	If an action or a situation causes a burden, it should not be carried out
Numbers	If numbers serve as an illustration of a problem or a burden, the issue should be solved
Abuse	If an action or a situation abuses the system, it should not be carried out
Saviour	An actor presents himself/herself as the one who could eradicate a problem or a burden because of their ideologies/positions/ranks
Fear	If an action or a situation is depicted as a danger/threat, it should not be carried out
Responsibility	If an action or a situation is depicted as being undertaken because it is for the good of the system, it should be taken
Comparison	If an action or a situation is compared to another to illustrate a burden/ problem/danger/threat, it should not be carried out

Note: adapted from Reisigl and Wodak (2001).

To capture the evolution of the bordering narratives, I identified three periods within the timespan that relate to the partial closure of state borders: 1 January–12 March (arrival of the pandemic), 13 March–15 June (partial closure of state borders) and 16 June–31 August

(reopening of the borders). The partial closure of state borders means that the state borders were closed for everyone except those who had a work permit for Switzerland (e.g. cross-border workers).

In the theoretical section of this chapter, I argued that RWPPs consider the border as an essential resource to manage migratory movements and regulate migration flows (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015; Rheindorf and Wodak 2018; Schain 2019). In this context, RWPPs contribute to classifying different regimes of migration by labelling different categories and types of migrants from a normative perspective (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). On the one hand, it has been largely argued in the field of migration studies that migratory movements depend on various individual, political, institutional and structural factors (Moret 2016). Consequently, an approach comparing the different categories of migration remains analytically useful to better understand the specific discourses provided by various actors in shaping different types of migration (Pasquali 2022). The goal of the approach described here is not to normatively legitimise the categories of migrants reproduced and perpetuated by RWPPs. Instead, it seeks to reflect empirically on the normative construction of these interpretative categories (see Anderson 2019) to get a better understanding of how bordering narratives are shaped differently for migrants in general, on the one hand, and cross-border workers, on the other hand. The categorisation of different types of migrants is part of the RWPPs' logic of differential securitisation, which involves constructing distinct discourses related to a normative representation of various categories or types of migrants (KhosraviNik 2010; Rheindorf and Wodak 2018).

Thus, to better understand the specificities of the right-wing populist discourse on the various categories of migrants they shape from an analytical perspective, I purposely assigned the corpus of data two different migration variables (i.e. international migration and cross-border mobility), depending on the type of migrants targeted by the RWPPs.[22] The number of articles collected for each party, phase and category is shown in Table 6.4. While international migration covers all kinds of migration (based on cultural, economic or social purposes – e.g. asylum seekers, economic migrants and refugees), cross-border mobility outlines a specific category within this general definition as it refers to "a person who works in one country and resides in the neighbouring country, and crosses the international border each workday" (Alegría 2002: 37). With respect to cross-border mobility, migration is not meant to be permanent but performed during a specific period

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[22] Both variables have been used as mutually exclusive migration categories within the coding process.

and undertaken for specific (especially labour-related) purposes (Foulkes 2014). While cross-border mobility is part of the general category of international migration, I isolated this specific type of migration to better capture the specificities of the right-wing populist discourse on cross-border movement (as cross-border workers could still cross the border with their work permits during the partial closure of the border).

This divide between the two categories is analytically useful for the following reasons: On the one hand, while the Geneva borderland is part of the Greater Geneva CBR, which is characterised by a strong functional form of integration, cross-border grievances provide an opportunity for regional RWPPs to mobilise around cross-border issues and resonate with Genevan voters' resentments (Herzog and Sohn 2014). On the other hand, the regional anchoring of the RWPPs in the Geneva borderland makes it possible to explore the multi-scalar construction of bordering narratives relating to border and migration issues and, thus, explore how cross-border grievances are framed not only at the national level but also at the local level by sidestepping an analytical orientation embedded in methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002).

Table 6.4 – Number of articles per phase, party and category of migration

	Geneva SVP		MCG		
	International migration	Cross-border mobility	International migration	Cross-border mobility	Total
1st phase	26	6	-	13	45
2nd phase	22	10	3	1	36
3rd phase	63	23	8	6	100
Total	111	39	11	20	181

Note: Two explanations can be given for the smaller amount of material of the MCG. Firstly, this party has fewer resources than the Geneva SVP. And secondly, according to an interview with a representative from the party, the MCG did not want to make too many statements during this period, as doing so would have led to hasty conclusions about the consequences of the pandemic.

6.4. Fighting Immigration and Legitimising Borders: Investigating the Argumentation Strategies

This section empirically explores the bordering narratives used by the Geneva SVP and the MCG in relation to the three periods involving the partial closure of state borders and the two different variables regarding the different categories of migration targeted. Accordingly, the aim is to understand how RWPPs discursively legitimise borders and anti-immigration stances and which argumentation strategies they provide by exploring the bordering narratives they fuelled. These strategies facilitate the RWPPs' inclusion or exclusion of some categories of people by symbolically and materially legitimising the border as either a wall or a gate.

RWPPs tend to exploit crises by exaggerating the porousness of borders (Brubaker, 2017) and adapt their positions to the context in which they compete (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021; Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel 2018). Therefore, I expect that the Covid-19 pandemic would lead to a strong re-bordering narrative by the Geneva SVP and the MCG. In this context, the RWPPs would capitalise on the contextual opportunities created by the pandemic to discursively shape bordering narratives related to cross-border grievances in the Geneva borderland. They would do so by adopting a radical discourse on borders and migration. Moreover, this narrative would change according to the various phases of the pandemic (i.e. before, during and after the partial closure of state borders). Finally, both RWPPs would provide similar and different bordering narratives depending on the distinct ideological supply, or ideological agendas, that they provide (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017).

6.4.1. The Arrival of the Pandemic

In the first phase, RWPPs' discourses deal with the gradual increase in the number of cases, which culminated in the partial closure of the state borders. The first Covid-19 case appeared in Switzerland on 25 February 2020 in the canton of Ticino. On 27 February, a

prevention campaign was launched by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. The following day, the Swiss government banned gatherings of more than 1,000 people.

'The Non-Existent Border'

Considering the variable of cross-border mobility, the Geneva SVP mainly used the topic of health combined with the topos of fear. Example 1 underlines this pattern. In this excerpt, the party implicitly criticises the Swiss government's measures, which they say are unfit to deal with the danger posed by Covid-19. The party criticises the lack of measures regarding cross-border workers – potentially bearers of the virus – who can still come to work in Switzerland. This statement makes use of irony to emphasise the ineffectiveness of the measures and to condemn open borders. This example sheds light on the need to close state borders in order to contain the virus during the first period.

> **Example 1**
>
> Italy has a quarter of its population under quarantine, but cross-border workers working in Switzerland don't pose any threat. Covid-19 is dangerous in Italy but profitable in Switzerland. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 9 March 2020)

Another common combination is the topic of criminality and the topos of fear. As illustrated in Example 2, the party criticises the ineffectiveness of the border, since the Schengen Area is no longer considered a tool of protection. The party makes use of dramatisation by condemning this porousness and defines the border as "non-existent". It implicitly condemns open borders by emphasising the danger posed by the border's proximity because of cross-border criminality.

> **Example 2**
>
> The canton's vulnerability, because of the proximity of the border, explains why we are attractive to foreign criminals (…). Schengen made the border not only porous but also non-existent. Contrary to the promises that were made, the border no longer protects us. On the contrary, it offers criminals all the facilities required to operate in peace: in terms of physical attacks, attacks on cash transport vans or ATMs. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 9 February 2020)

One last relevant combination is the topic of employment and the topos of burden. French cross-border workers are considered a burden on local people because they "cost" less and,

thus, steal jobs from Genevan residents. Again, this pattern is implicitly aimed at promoting tighter border controls by criticising the free movement of persons and exaggerating the volume of cross-border workers who will reach Geneva to find a job.

For the MCG, the topic of employment together with the topos of burden – that is to say, French cross-border workers as job thieves – is the most-used combination. Other combinations are the topic of employment and the topoi of responsibility and numbers. The topos of responsibility expresses the need for the city of Geneva to be responsible and promote the employment of local young and old people instead of cross-border workers. The MCG uses the topos of numbers to illustrate the volume of French cross-border workers, dramatise the situation and implicitly portray the canton as a victim of cross-border integration, as illustrated in Example 3. Those patterns are still part of the demand to establish stricter border controls.

> **Example 3**
>
> The use of cross-border labour is not weakening and is not about to stop. From December 2018 to 2019, 4,032 cross-border workers came to work in the canton, for a total of 87,104 people, the Cantonal Statistics Office reported on Thursday. That is a growth of 4.9%, which comes after two years when it had only been 1.1% and 1.6%, well below a rate that is more like 5% per year... (MCG, Facebook post, 21 February 2020)

'Immigration Costs'

Considering the variable of international migration, the Geneva SVP mainly used the topic of employment with the topos of burden to condemn the employment of European immigrants instead of locals because of their lower cost. Another interesting combination is the topics of agreements and housing/infrastructures and the topos of burden. By using the agreements–burden combination to portray Genevans as becoming poorer, the Geneva SVP emphasises the need to halt the free movement of persons in order to increase the domestic product, as illustrated in Example 4. By using the housing/infrastructure–burden pattern, the party seeks to underline the problems relating to the lack of accommodation and the traffic congestion resulting from a high influx of immigrants, who are portrayed as the cause of these issues.

Example 4

Why is it absolutely necessary to put an end to the free movement of persons? The free movement of persons, which has been enforced for 13 years, has not increased our prosperity; quite the contrary. The domestic product per capita has remained practically the same since the free movement of persons was introduced. Production has certainly increased as a result of population growth, but what ultimately counts is what is left in people's wallets. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 7 February 2020)

Finally, another combination was the topic of permissiveness and the topos of numbers. This combination aims to show that the influx of immigrants, allowed by the Federal Council, is too high for the country. The aim is again to underline the need for stricter border controls. The MCG does not make any claim about international migration during this phase but focuses on French cross-border workers in particular – that is, on the variable of cross-border mobility.

6.4.2. The Partial Closure of State Borders

In the second phase, state borders were partially closed, along with schools and cultural events, to contain the spread of the virus. On 13 March 2020, the Swiss government prohibited gatherings of more than 100 people and closed schools. Three days later, the government declared a state of emergency and closed non-essential shops, restaurants, bars and cultural and sports events and enforced remote working. In addition, it partially closed the country's borders by restricting entry to anyone except those with a work permit in Switzerland.

'The Relevance of Border Controls'

Regarding the variable of cross-border mobility, the Geneva SVP used the topic of employment with the topos of burden. This combination refers to the fact that following the pandemic and considering the bad condition of the French labour market, there will be a massive increase in the number of French cross-border workers in the canton of Geneva. In this phase, a new combination is used: the topic of security and the topos of comparison.

The goal of this comparison is to depict Geneva (and Genevans) as a victim(s) of the Schengen agreements, as shown in Example 5. This example is of particular interest, as the border is depicted as a tool of protection and as a normative concrete entity. The other most-used combination was the topic of sovereignty and the topos of responsibility, which emphasises the sovereignty (and implicit accountability) resulting from the closure of borders given the decrease in burglaries, among others.

> **Example 5**
>
> Geneva is suffering the consequences of opening the borders following Switzerland's accession to the Schengen Area. Year after year, police crime statistics place Geneva on the list of the cantons with the highest crime rate, despite reassuring official communications. With the resumption of border controls following the coronavirus pandemic, states are observing a drop in crime. It is proof of the effectiveness of border controls in the fight against crime. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 22 April 2020)

The MCG focuses mostly on the topics of employment and taxation, together with the topos of burden, as well as the topic of sovereignty with the topos of responsibility. The first pattern criticises French cross-border workers for contributing to the rise in unemployment. The party has used the taxation–burden combination to criticise the high amount of taxes on cross-border workers being sent back to France and has called for more of those taxes to be kept in the canton of Geneva.[23] The party uses the sovereignty–responsibility combination to emphasise the state's responsibility towards Geneva's residents in the context of the emergency created by the Covid-19 pandemic, as shown in Example 6.

> **Example 6**
>
> We must now face the Covid-19 pandemic. We don't know the resulting outcomes yet. We are convinced that the defence of Genevan residents must come first in this emergency. We must pursue pragmatic politics, which will make it possible to find the best solution for the future. (MCG, Official party release, 31 Mach 2020)

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[23] Based on a 1973 agreement, the canton of Geneva has to give back 3.5 per cent of the cross-border workers' payroll tax to France every year.

'Borders Protect Us'

Regarding the variable of international migration, the Geneva SVP has made significant use of the topic of employment with the topos of burden. It mentions the need for tighter border controls to prevent the high influx of immigrants, which is the outcome of allowing the free movement of persons, because of the sharp rise in unemployment in neighbouring countries and the high rate of unemployment in Switzerland following the Covid-19 crisis. Two other frequently used combinations are the topic of permissiveness with the topoi of numbers and abuse. By presenting numbers and figures, the permissiveness–numbers combination refers to the necessity of border controls to diminish illegal migration, as illustrated in Example 7. The permissiveness–abuse combination claims that immigrants take advantage of Swiss social institutions. The Geneva SVP stressed this point by dramatising an "invasion" of immigrants and depicting them as a threat, as illustrated in Example 8. Interestingly, the topic of health was prominent and interlinked with the topoi of fear and responsibility. According to the health–fear pattern, the reopening of national borders would lead to a healthcare disaster, while the health–responsibility pattern highlighted the need for (and responsibility to impose) stricter border controls to prevent the spread of the disease, as illustrated in Example 9.

> **Example 7**
>
> The entry controls and restrictions imposed at the borders due to Covid-19 caused a sharp drop in illegal entries and stays in Switzerland. Since the introduction of these measures, the number of illegal stays recorded by the authorities has fallen by 55% to 80% (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 23 May 2020)

> **Example 8**
>
> Swiss people will be able to make their choice in the light of their experiences with the Covid-19 crisis and, therefore, decide that Switzerland should once again manage immigration on its territory, so that Swiss men and women no longer feel like foreigners in their own country and prevent immigrants from exploiting their social institutions. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 23 May 2020)

> **Example 9**
>
> As a result of Covid-19, Switzerland has decided to close its borders. This measure has protected us not only from the virus but also from criminality (…) At a time when the gradual reopening begins, the border remains more than ever a protective element, also at the economic level. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 5 June 2020)

The combinations that the MCG used most often were the topic of security with the topos of fear, and the topic of employment with the topos of responsibility. This pattern underlines the need to rediscover borders as a source of protection by exaggerating their role in protecting (and implicitly ensuring the survival of) democracy, as illustrated in Example 10. The second pattern focuses on undeclared work as a major problem relating to immigrants, who are blamed for such issues.[24]

> **Example 10**
>
> Let's also mention the rediscovery of borders – a fight that the MCG has been leading for at least 10 years – because the border is not a barrier but a protection. Let's not forget that the so-called dogmatic openness is a mortal danger to our democracy. (MCG, official party release, 12 May 2020)[25]

6.4.3. The Reopening of the Border

On 15 June 2020, the Swiss government, in cooperation with the European Union, started to reopen Switzerland's external borders. The limit on gatherings was relaxed, and schools, non-essential shops, restaurants, bars, cultural and sports events reopened.

'Open Borders Lead to Criminality and Spread the Virus'

Regarding the variable of cross-border mobility, the Geneva SVP again focused significantly on the employment–burden pattern by stating that hiring French cross-border workers costs Genevan employers less. Other combinations that were used are the topic of employment with the topoi of numbers and comparison. The goal of the employment–numbers pattern is to use numbers to overstate the surge in cross-border workers, while the employment–comparison pattern emphasises the rise in the unemployment rate resulting

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[24] The context of this argumentation strategy is a referendum initiated by the MCG against the funding of undeclared work through the loss of income allowance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

[25] In the article, the MCG presents immigration as a threat to the existence of democracy as a collection of economic, welfare and social arrangements.

from cross-border mobility. Another interesting pattern is the combination of the topic of criminality and the topos of fear. Using this combination, the party depicted the border as the only way to diminish criminality, as illustrated in Example 11. The topic of health was used with the topos of fear to warn that reopening state borders would allow contagious people to enter Switzerland. Accordingly, the party blamed the free movement of persons for the reappearance of Covid-19 infections after the closure of national borders had nearly eliminated the virus.

> **Example 11**
>
> It is, of course, the closing of the borders that has contributed to this reduction in crime and burglaries in an area where cross-border crime is significant. Year after year, Geneva is placed on the list of cantons with the highest rates of criminality in the country. (Geneva SVP, Official party newspaper, August 2020)

The MCG mostly combines the topic of employment with the topoi of burden and responsibility. The employment–responsibility pattern aims to emphasise the need to overcome the cross-border flows to protect Genevan workers. An interesting combination is the topic of employment and the topos of saviour. In this pattern, the aim is to underline the active involvement of the MCG – the only saviour – in repelling cross-border workers, as illustrated in Example 12.

> **Example 12**
>
> The over-competition of cross-border work or the dumping of wages suffered by Geneva's SMEs remain our main concerns and push us to intervene most actively despite our minority position. (MCG, official party release, 29 August 2020)[26]

'Border Controls Provide Security'

With regard to the variable of international migration, the Geneva SVP mainly used patterns such as employment–burden, permissiveness–numbers, agreements–burden and housing/infrastructures–burden. A new pattern is the combination of the topic of environment and the topos of burden, which states that the free movement of persons destroys nature because of the construction of accommodation for immigrants. Another interesting combination is security–comparison. As Example 13 shows, the party cites

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[26] In its party release, the MCG defends SMEs hiring Swiss workers instead of cross-border workers.

border control as the only way to increase security through a normative justification of the border as a tool of defence.

> **Example 13**
>
> We must control the borders. For example, since we reopened them, there has been a robbery. We are much safer when the borders are monitored and controlled. (Geneva SVP, Facebook post, 22 June 2020)

The MCG focused not only on the employment–burden pattern to decry the pressure of clandestine work on Swiss workers but also on the employment–abuse pattern by criticising the state "authorising" undeclared work. Another interesting combination is the topic of taxation and the topos of responsibility, which the party deploys to highlight its preference for social assistance over illegal work, as illustrated by Example 14.

> **Example 14**
>
> For us, it is a cancer on society to have people who are exploited and who cause wage dumping for the entire population. We believe that it is better to first go through social assistance than through a loss of income. (MCG, Facebook post, 6 August 2020).[27]

6.4.4. Argumentation Strategies During the Pandemic: An Overview

With respect to the analysis of the argumentation strategies used by the RWPPs, the context of the pandemic and the partial closure of state borders reinforced discourses against immigration and open borders. In their statements, the RWPPs used exaggeration, dramatisation, victimisation and irony to legitimise the exclusion of cross-border workers and other categories of migrants and to praise the benefits of having stricter border controls.

The argumentation strategies of the first phase aimed to show the porosity of the border and, implicitly, the need to close state borders. In the second phase, the parties emphasised

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[27] The context of this statement is that there are illegal workers who receive money through a loss of income insurance, which, according to the MCG, pushes down the wages of the rest of the population. To better combat wage dumping and illegal work, the MCG suggests regularising migrants. If they meet the requirements, they could receive social assistance.

the benefits of having closed the borders, while in the third phase they showed the negative consequences of reopening the state borders. The main differences between the two parties lie in the argumentation strategies they focused on. While the MCG mostly focused on themes relating to employment, taxation, security and sovereignty involving cross-border threats, the argumentation strategies mobilised by the Geneva SVP were broader and ranged from health care to agreements, permissiveness, housing/infrastructures, environment and criminality. Surprisingly, despite the context of the pandemic, the MCG never focused on the topic of health.

The following paragraphs aim to provide an overview of the argumentation strategies used by both RWPPs regarding the categories of cross-border mobility and international migration.

Cross-border mobility

Figure 6.1 – Most-used combinations for the MCG regarding the variable of cross-border mobility
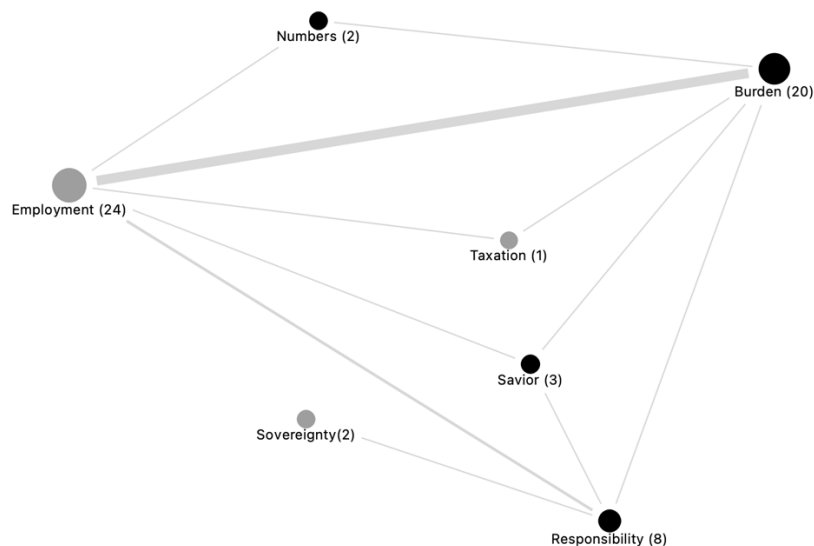
Note: The map was made with the code relation browser functionality of MAXQDA. The map shows the interrelations (i.e. intersections) of topics and topoi within the dataset. The numbers in parentheses show the number of coded segments for each topic/topos. The lines' thickness illustrates the intensity degree of the interrelations between the codes.

Figure 6.2 – Most-used combinations for the Geneva SVP regarding the variable of cross-border mobility

Note: The map was made with the code relation browser functionality of MAXQDA. The map shows the interrelations (i.e. intersections) of topics and topoi within the dataset. The numbers in parentheses show the number of coded segments for each topic/topos. The lines' thickness illustrates the intensity degree of the interrelations between the codes.

Regarding the variable of cross-border mobility, the RWPPs commonly used the combinations of employment–burden, employment–numbers and sovereignty–responsibility (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2 for a visual representation of the used combinations). On the one hand, the patterns of employment–burden and employment–numbers were used to portray cross-border workers as an economic threat because they would take the Genevans' jobs; hence, these patterns prioritise Genevan residents. On the other hand, the pattern of sovereignty–responsibility stressed the need to regain control over the pandemic with the help of borders and pragmatic politics regarding cross-border issues by focusing on employment concerns for the MCG and criminality concerns for the Geneva SVP. At the same time, while the MCG focused on the taxation–burden pattern to criticise that part of the cross-border workers' taxes are sent back to France, the Geneva SVP focused on health–fear, criminality–fear and security–comparison patterns to demonstrate how a stricter border control regime would reduce criminality, improve security and contain Covid-19. The geographical proximity with the border was dominant in the corpus of data relating to cross-border mobility. The threats relate to this symbolic proximity.

International Migration

Figure 6.3 – Most-used combinations for the MCG regarding the variable of international migration
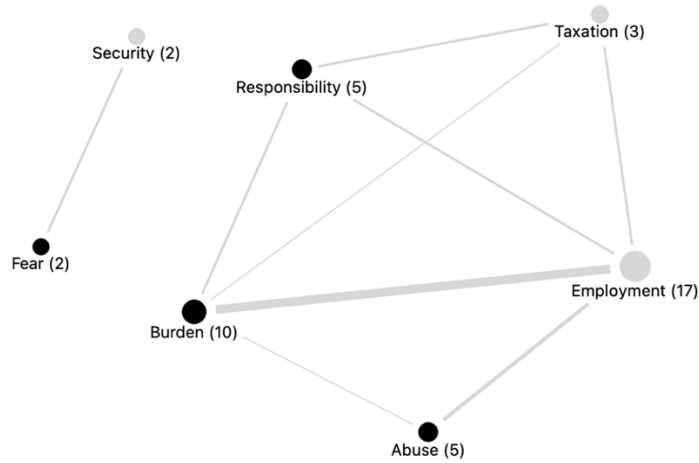
Note: The map was made with the code relation browser functionality of MAXQDA. The map shows the interrelations (i.e. intersections) of topics and topoi within the dataset. The numbers in parentheses show the number of coded segments for each topic/topos. The lines' thickness illustrates the intensity degree of the interrelations between the codes.

Figure 6.4 – Most-used combinations for the Geneva SVP regarding the variable of international migration

Note: The map was made with the code relation browser functionality of MAXQDA. The map shows the interrelations (i.e. intersections) of topics and topoi within the dataset. The numbers in parentheses show the number of coded segments for each topic/topos. The lines' thickness illustrates the intensity degree of the interrelations between the codes.

Regarding the variable of international migration, the RWPPs often used the pattern of employment–burden to blame European economic migrants as an economic threat (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4 for a visual representation of the used combinations). At the same time, the MCG focused on the security–fear pattern to legitimise borders as a source of protecting democracy and the taxation–responsibility pattern to fight illegal work. In turn, the Geneva SVP used the housing/infrastructures–burden pattern to blame immigrants for stealing houses and overloading roads and public transport, the environment–burden pattern to blame immigrants for destroying Geneva's natural heritage and the agreements–burden pattern to blame the free movement of persons and the Schengen Agreement as economic threats. Furthermore, the Geneva SVP used patterns such as permissiveness–numbers, security–fear and security–comparison to legitimise the partial closure of state borders to decrease the number of (illegal) migrants and improve security. Finally, the Geneva SVP used the health–fear and health–responsibility patterns to legitimise the partial closure of state borders to avoid an "invasion" of people infected with Covid-19. Consequently, the corpus of data coded with the variable of international migration was oriented towards general concerns about the problems induced by migration.

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the goal was to explore which specific bordering narratives arose in the right-wing populist anti-immigration and border discourse in a borderland during a time of crisis and how those narratives evolved. The chapter aimed to fill a gap in the study of right-wing populist discourses in such European regions, as well as in the analysis of the relationship between right-wing populism and the discursive construction of borders. Moreover, the aim was to focus on a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, which allowed RWPPs to use spatial aspects of identity and give both political and symbolic responses to transnational flows (Casaglia et al. 2020). As RWPPs tend to exploit crises by exaggerating the porousness of borders (Brubaker, 2017) and adapt their positions to the context in which they compete (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021; Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel 2018), I hypothesised that these parties would produce a strong re-bordering narrative that would vary according to the different phases of the pandemic and the partial closure of state borders. Besides, RWPPs would provide similar and different bordering narratives

depending on the distinct ideological supply, or ideological agendas, that they provide (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017).

Firstly, the context of the Covid-19 pandemic seems to have provided a fertile ground for both the Geneva SVP and the MCG. Through context-dependent argumentation strategies that combine the topics of health, criminality, security, permissiveness and sovereignty with topoi such as fear, comparison, numbers and responsibility, the two RWPPs used the context of the pandemic to discursively reinforce the imaginary of the border as protection and wall against intruders in a radicalised re-bordering narrative. These discursive patterns linked to the partial closure of state borders during the pandemic were used to legitimise a discourse against immigration and open borders. At the same time, it has been argued that the similarities and differences in the mobilisation of bordering narratives could be attributed to the distinct ideological supply, or ideological agendas, that both RWPPs provide. While the MCG focused extensively on cross-border threats, the Geneva SVP provided a discourse articulated around broader topics. Furthermore, as outlined by the president of the MCG, the party did not want to draw hasty conclusions about the consequences of the pandemic.

Secondly, during the pandemic, the first phase was used to call for the closure of state borders, the second emphasised the advantages of closing them, and the third highlighted the peril of reopening them. The results show that these argumentation strategies are based on "rationalisation legitimisation" (i.e. legitimising the border as a form of protection that should be kept under control) and with "moral legitimisation" (i.e. legitimising stringent border controls as a responsible act to safeguard social security and public interests) (Rheindorf and Wodak 2018).

Thirdly, the empirical investigations between two different analytical categories (i.e. international migration and cross-border mobility) aimed to illustrate how RWPPs contribute to shaping bordering narratives differently depending on whether they target cross-border issues, such as cross-border workers stealing jobs from Genevan residents, or general migratory issues, such as fighting illegal migration, the overloading of roads or the alleged invasion by people infected with the Covid-19 virus. This contributes to showing how RWPPs discursively shape distinct bordering narratives when considering the multi-scalar territorial issues (i.e. cross-border and international threats) that they focus on.

It is interesting to note that only the Geneva SVP used the topic of health to reinforce the border as a tool of defence in an "immunitarian" perspective; according to Minca and Rijke (2018: 87), borders can be conceptualised in an immunitarian fashion and serve to protect

an organic territorial body "from the real or imagined contamination of alien bodies" by portraying immigrants as vectors of diseases. Those infected invaders are, in this sense, used as scapegoats to legitimise the closure of state borders (Radil et al., 2021).

At the same time, other argumentation strategies developed through topics such as employment, taxation, housing/infrastructures, environment and agreements were not necessarily related to the pandemic but represented the usual argumentation strategies displayed by RWPPs and generally associated with immigration (see Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006; Skenderovic, 2007). However, the pandemic context seems to have provided a rich environment for RWPPs to (re)affirm their positions and reinforce their claims on migration and border issues that have long been present in their discourse.

This chapter showed that the argumentation strategies deployed by the Geneva SVP and the MCG during the pandemic undeniably promote the need for stricter border controls – if not an explicit closure of state borders – in what I identified as the moralisation of bordering. The moralisation of bordering is based on the discourse of fear espoused by RWPPs that use imagined dangers (e.g. immigrants being blamed for society's problems (Wodak 2015)) to legitimise the need for tighter border controls. In this vein, and as argued by Schain (2019), Osuna (2022) and Demata (2022), RWPPs have been successful in framing migration issues around securitisation given the challenge that migratory movements pose to internal security. As such, the pandemic context has further legitimised the categorical function of the border in managing and regulating migration (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015).

The results suggest that RWPPs in the Geneva borderland use a strong re-bordering narrative to symbolise the border as a wall and a tool for protection (Rheindorf and Wodak 2020). They do this by celebrating a kind of idealised endangered heartland (Taggart, 2000). Consequently, the thesis of ambivalence associated with the RWPPs' bordering narratives (Biancalana and Mazzoleni 2020; Lamour and Varga 2020b; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017) does not fit the specific context of this study. In normal (non-crisis) times, RWPPs must take the context in which they evolve into consideration – here, a context of strong functional interdependence with the other side of the border – by displaying an ambivalent discourse based on contextual opportunities and constraints. However, the context-specific break generated by the Covid-19 crisis allowed Geneva-based RWPPs to promote a strong re-bordering narrative. This chapter demonstrated how a context such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting partial closure of state borders seems to have represented a significant, context-specific opportunity for Geneva's RWPPs to endorse an unequivocal

discourse against the strong functional and interdependent transborder mobility of people, goods, capital and services in the Geneva borderland. Surprisingly, the MCG adopted an avoidance strategy by not focusing on the topic of health. As the party tends to devote a lot of attention to cross-border grievances, and as it knew that the Geneva healthcare system would collapse without cross-border health workers, the MCG avoided mobilising healthcare issues in order to take advantage of the crisis context. Thus, the party displayed a strong re-bordering narrative that avoided an ambivalent discourse.

Finally, this chapter showed that the RWPPs engage with multiple territorial scales when constructing their bordering narratives. By exploring the bordering narratives shaped around the variable of cross-border mobility, the results show that borders do not necessarily equate with the nation-state *per se* in the right-wing populist discourse but instead unfold simultaneously below and beyond national boundaries. The aim was to move beyond a methodological nationalist analytical perspective, which takes a normative, constructed nationalist image of the social world as an assumed truth (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002), and to avoid the territorial trap of seeing the territorial state as the container of politics and society (Agnew 1994; 2008).

7. Distinct Models of Symbolic Multi-Scalar Border Framing: Exploring Referential Strategies in the Geneva and Basel Borderlands during Sub-State Cantonal Elections

This chapter aims to understand how right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) discursively shape borders through multiple scales when they create a Manichean division between "us" and "them" (i.e. symbolic multi-scalar border framing). Accordingly, the chapter aims to address the following research questions: How do RWPPs contribute to symbolically shaping borders through multiple scales in the Geneva and Basel borderlands during sub-state cantonal elections? And how could different models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing unfold when considering the construction of "the people" and "the elites" in a Manichean antagonistic division?

As exposed in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), over the past few decades, globalisation has led to some territorial reconfigurations. An important example is European integration, which has profoundly changed the understanding of territorial borders due to the increased mobility of people, goods, capital and services (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999; Brenner 2004; Jensen and Richardson 2004; Lamour 2014). In this context, political dynamics are no longer contained by national borders, as they are built around multiple scales through a logic of spatial rescaling induced by global transnational flows that crisscross state territories (Laine 2016; Casaglia 2020). Understanding borders as multi-scalar entities challenges the taken-for-granted state-centric approach that considers territorial borders as objective facts. It does so by reconceptualising them as realities dependent on perceptions, experiences and negotiations (Rumford 2012). Indeed, supranational integration has provided new opportunities for transnational configurations where new geopolitical scales emerged (Häkli 2008; Jessop 2000; Perkmann and Sum 2002).

This changing perspective has fostered a territorial restructuring of politics by revitalising sub-state political arenas in which political parties play a relevant role, as they nurture

regional political mobilisations (Hepburn 2009; Detterbeck 2012; Keating 2014; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017). As argued by Hepburn (2014) and Amat, Jurado and León (2020), territorial mobilisation is closely interlinked with party organisational structures; therefore, the decentralisation of party organisations stimulates the politicisation of regional policy outcomes. This process also affects RWPPs, which have to adapt their ideological supply to regional characteristics in order to reach their constituency (Detterbeck and Hepburn 2010; Heinisch, Massetti, and Mazzoleni 2020; Massetti 2009). The ideological supply determines the parties' core positions on specific issues during election campaigns, as outlined in their party platforms (Braun and Schmitt 2020; Gross and Jankowski 2020).

To explore the symbolic construction of borders through multiple scales, or symbolic multi-scalar border framing, I analyse how right-wing populist sub-state parties discursively frame "the people" and "the elites" in their ideological supply. They construct a Manichean division between the people as a homogeneous undifferentiated group and the elites, or the establishment, as scapegoats pursuing their own interests and dealing with transnational and global institutions (Pelinka 2013; Wodak 2017). By framing the homogeneous "pure" people in opposition to corrupt elites, RWPPs discursively legitimise a symbolic border between "us" and "them". Consequently, they contribute to symbolically shaping borders by reproducing territorial logics through an in-group and out-group membership categorisation (Wodak 2021b; Basile and Mazzoleni 2020; Casaglia et al. 2020). In this chapter, I demonstrate that two different models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing emerge, depending on the interest rescaling thesis (see Keating 2014), which provides different opportunities and constraints for RWPPs to rescale their discourse at either the regional or the national scale.

The analysis is based on two different case studies in the Geneva and Basel borderlands, which are composed of sub-state cantonal branches of the Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP): the Geneva SVP, the Basel-City SVP and the Basel-Country SVP. The corpus includes the party manifestos provided by the sub-state cantonal parties during cantonal elections. It has been argued that party manifestos are a compelling and reliable source that can be used to understand the political parties' ideological supply (Braun and Schmitt 2020; Gross and Jankowski 2020).

The reminder of this chapter is organised as follows. Section 1 shows the intertwined relation between decentralised party organisational structures and sub-state political mobilisation. It also examines two distinct models of right-wing populist symbolic multi-

scalar border framing by theoretically reflecting on the right-wing populist discursive construction of "the people" and "the elites" through multiple scales, or through the jumping scale strategy, according to the rescaling of their interests, and whether the right-wing populist discourse can be characterised with or without regionalism. Section 2 provides contextual information about cantonal sub-state elections and the Geneva and Basel borderlands. Section 3 presents the chapter's methodology. Section 4 empirically explores how right-wing populist sub-state parties contribute to the symbolic construction of borders through multiple scales by presenting two distinct models of right-wing populist multi-scalar border framing. Finally, section 5 summarises the results and provides concluding remarks.

7.1. Two Models of Right-Wing Populist Symbolic Multi-Scalar Border Framing

As broadly argued throughout this thesis, globalisation and the supranational European process have led to a territorial restructuring of politics and society, which has provided new opportunities for transnational configurations (Perkmann and Sum 2002) and created new forms of territorialisation based on new temporalities and spatialities (Maier 2016; Popescu 2012; Sohn 2016).

The nation-state cannot be merely considered the primary level for territorial politics; instead, territorial politics has been decentralised across multiple levels (Swenden and Maddens 2008). As Keating (2021: 34) argues:

> Political and identities, usually conceptualized as pertaining to the national (that is the state) level, are reconfiguring as the mystique of the nation-state is weakening. It is not that identities are shifting from the state to supra-state, global or sub-state levels, but that they are becoming more pluralist. New and revived territorial movements are challenging the hegemony of the nation-state and territory is increasingly used as an element in political competition. New territorial scales are being institutionalized at the supra-national, regional and local level.

As the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) posits, the weakening of national barriers has led to a rescaling of political mobilisation across different scales: regional, national,

interstate, international, European and cross-border (Mazzoleni 2017). Sassen (2006: 402) supports the need to critically escape from a national realm in research and highlights the importance of considering wider territorial scales (e.g. global and subnational):

> Different temporal and spatial orders are shown to be wired into material practices, infrastructures, and institutional framings. Change can be shown as conditioned by capabilities developed in period that is about to be left behind. Research strategies need to address thick environments, multisited localized domains, and small worlds in global systems.

Political parties are operating in multi-layered democratic settings where regional and local territories must be taken into account (Hough and Jeffery 2006; Detterbeck 2012; Heinisch, Massetti and Mazzoleni 2020), especially when considering the multi-scalar configuration of RWPPs' discursive construction of borders.

Against this backdrop, this chapter will emphasise how the organisational features of RWPPs are closely intertwined with sub-state political mobilisation. Furthermore, by presenting two different models of right-wing populist symbolic multi-scalar border framing, it provides insight into how RWPPs can shape the people and the elites through multiple scales, or through the jumping scale strategy, according to various spaces of dependence and engagement. This depends on whether they provide a right-wing populist discourse with or without regionalism, based on the degree of "regionalisation" in the borderlands in which they operate and compete.

7.1.1. Right-Wing Populist Parties' Organisational Structures: Between Centralisation and Decentralisation

As territorial restructuring has led to a revitalisation of sub-state political arenas, political parties have a greater incentive to nurture regional political mobilisation (Hepburn 2009; Detterbeck 2012; Keating 2014; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017). This is crucial for state-wide parties, for which decentralisation at the regional level stimulates a politicisation of regional policy outcomes (Amat, Jurado, and León 2020). By focusing on the multi-level politics of immigration, Hepburn (2014: 44) shows the intertwined relationship between party decentralisation and regional mobilisation: "The decentralization of party structures also

enables regional branches of parties to approach immigration in distinctive ways, which may involve developing a custom-made regional approach to migrant integration".

Consequently, parties' organisational structures depend on exogenous multi-level configurations, and state-wide parties in multi-level political systems must adapt to regional characteristics in order to foster their interests (Detterbeck and Hepburn 2010; Heinisch, Massetti and Mazzoleni 2020). This is especially relevant for state-wide parties in federalist states. Because they evolve in multi-level electoral systems, they compete for regional elections in which their ideological agenda must be adapted to the regional context to reach their constituency (Fabre 2008; Müller 2013; Hepburn 2014). This is encompassed within the rescaling process, which outlines the construction of new governance and regulation configurations by various actors. It involves the movement of social, economic and political interests towards new spatial levels above, below and across states (Keating 2013; 2014; Swyngedouw 2004).

From a West European comparative perspective, Heinisch and Mazzoleni (2016b: 227-232) differentiate between various state-wide RWPPs' organisational structures according to their institutional traditions and legacies. While some state-wide parties such as the Rassemblement National (National Rally, RN) in France, the Lega (League, LSP) in Italy, Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party, FrP) in Norway and Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats, SD) in Sweden are strongly centralised and structured at the national level, other state-wide parties such as the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ) and the Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss People's Party, SVP) can be labelled as decentralised due to the sub-state branches' significant autonomy at the regional level.

Against this West European backdrop, two opposing tendencies seem to emerge (Amat, Jurado and León 2020): on the one hand, the predominance of state-wide parties that are strongly centralised at the national level, which are more inclined to provide a discourse centred on defending national interests; on the other hand, and to a lesser extent, according to the substantial autonomy given to sub-state branches at a regional level, decentralised state-wide parties with a greater inclination to provide a discourse focused on defending regional interests.

Importantly, decentralised state-wide RWPPs such as the FPÖ and the SVP, which grant significant autonomy to their sub-state branches, are evolving in federalist states. In federalist political systems, regions represent distinct political spaces where a strong autonomy of sub-state arenas occurs and the focus is on regional issues (Detterbeck 2012).

In such configurations, the sub-state branches of state-wide parties can strengthen regional empowerment and defend the needs and identity of the regional territory against potential external threats (Hepburn 2010).

Conversely, empirical case studies highlight how centralised state-wide RWPPs nurture national concerns. For example, while the RN tries to foster regional interests in order to address sub-national cultural and economic cleavages, the party's ideological agenda remains embedded at the national level (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018). Likewise, the ideological agenda of the LSP strongly focuses on national issues (Mazzoleni and Ruzza 2018).

7.1.2. Framing the People and the Elites through Multiple Scales: The Rescaling of Interests

As I argue in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), I conceptualise populism as a discourse stressing an internal frontier between the people and the others: for instance, the elites and the establishment. The people and the others can be considered empty signifiers, meaning that they can refer to a multiplicity of signifiers to address the disenchantments that the people are facing (Laclau 2005). RWPPs are typical actors who help to fulfil these empty signifiers and, thus, symbolically construct the discursive borders between "us" and "them" (i.e. the in- and out-groups) from a Manichean perspective. As shown by Biancalana and Mazzoleni (2020) and Brubaker (2017), this fluidity and ambivalence are part of the right-wing populist discourse.

RWPPs can help to reproduce territorial logics through the in- and out-group membership categorisation. As Casaglia et al. (2020: 4) assert, "borders and bordering help to delineate places, both familiar and faraway, and to spatialize the kinds of Us-versus-Them distinctions that populists rely on to articulate their grievances". I argue that populism is a chameleon-like phenomenon (Taggart 2000; Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021) that can adapt to different territorial scales. RWPPs operating at the sub-state level can produce a multi-level populism (Mazzoleni 2005; 2017; Heinisch, Holtz-Bacha, and Mazzoleni 2021) to shift the meaning of "the people" and "the elites" at different territorial scales, depending on political opportunities and constraints.

In this chapter, I focus in particular on the discursive construction of the people and the elites (i.e. vertical top-dimension), which are a significant part of the populist frame. At the same time, the examples provided in the empirical section show that constructing the people necessarily involves blaming "others" in a horizontal dimension – e.g. asylum seekers or economic refugees – to protect an endangered community.

The territorial logics inherent in the in- and out-group membership categorisation (i.e. the people and the elites) discursively constructed by RWPPs can be understood through the concept of the jumping scale strategy. As outlined in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), this strategy refers to how political actors operating in specific territorial spaces (spaces of dependence) can deal with other territorial scales (spaces of engagement) to compete and secure their social and territorial political interests. As Cox (1998: 2) argues,

> Spaces of dependence are defined by those more-or-less localized social relations upon which we depend for the realization of essential interests and for which there are no substitute elsewhere; they define place-specific conditions for our material well being and our sense of significance. These spaces are inserted in boarder sets of relationships of a more global character and these constantly threaten to undermine or dissolve them. People, firms, state agencies, etc., organize in order to secure the conditions for the continued existence of their space of dependence but in so doing they have to engage with other centers of social power: local government, the national press, perhaps the international press, for example. In so doing they construct a different form of space which I call here a space of engagement: the space in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds.

RWPPs are political actors using the jumping scale strategy to discursively construct symbolic borders. They use the jumping scale strategy by shaping their discourses at different territorial scales and, thus, engage in various spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement. I argue that RWPPs' discursive mobilisation of these various spaces of dependence and engagement is linked to the interest rescaling thesis. RWPPs rescale their interests at the regional scale depending on the opportunities and constraints of the socio-political territorial contexts in which they operate and compete. Keating (2014) identifies three important drivers in this process: 1) functional rescaling, which relates to the adaptiveness of actors to regional economy and policy challenges, 2) institutional rescaling, which depends on the ability and power of regional institutions to lock in social, economic and political interests at the regional level, with actors adapting to such a regional political game, and 3) territorial identity rescaling, which relates to the strength of regional

institutions to internalise and foster a shared regional identity and sense of belonging, with actors adapting to this condition.

Hence, considering these drivers, I expect that the different degrees of the "regionalisation" of interest rescaling in sub-state regions will contribute to shaping RWPPs' regional discourses with or without regionalism (see Keating and Wilson 2014 for more on regions with or without regionalism). On the one hand, a regional right-wing populist discourse with regionalism would define a discourse unfolding at the regional level, where regional specificities are successfully and significantly mobilised to shape and defend regional territorial interests (i.e. with a regional space of dependence). On the other hand, a regional populist discourse without regionalism would define a discourse unfolding at the regional level, where regional interests are left without substance and instead locked in at the national or state-wide level (i.e. with a national space of dependence).

I expect that different types of symbolic multi-scalar border framing would emerge depending on whether the regional right-wing populist discourse is shaped with or without regionalism. It can be expected that in regions where a strong degree of regional interest rescaling has taken place, RWPPs would be more inclined to provide a cross-regional border framing by discursively shaping the people and the elites in relation to the regional territorial entity. By contrast, in regions where a lower or more moderate degree of regional interest rescaling has taken place, RWPPs would be more inclined to provide a cross-national border framing by discursively shaping the people and the elites in relation to the national territorial entity.

This chapter analyses the party manifestos used by the SVP's sub-state cantonal branches in the Geneva and Basel borderlands. The party's organisational structure can be characterised as both centralised and decentralised because it alternates between state-wide centralisation and sub-state autonomy (see Chapter 4). Therefore, tensions could arise around the discursive construction of "the people" and "the elites" depending on the territorial entity of the region or the nation. By investigating these two different case studies, I will demonstrate how two distinct models of right-wing populist multi-scalar border framing (i.e. cross-regional or cross-national) can be applied to the Geneva and Basel borderlands during sub-state cantonal elections, based on the degree of "regionalisation" of interests.

7.2. Contextual Dimensions: Sub-state Cantonal Elections and the Geneva and Basel Borderlands

In the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), I provide an extensive description of the Swiss federalist political and institutional system, which consists of cantons that are sub-state-level autonomous entities with their own constitution and political authorities. For instance, they are in charge of the judicial, fiscal, healthcare and school systems. In this context, cantonal sub-state elections are important in defining the respective cantonal governments, which are directly elected by the people of the cantons. By contrast, in national elections, the federal executive government is elected by the legislative branch (Vatter 2022).

In this context, political parties are likely to mobilise at the regional level and politicise regional issues. Giger, Müller and Debus (2011) and Mueller and Bernauer (2018) demonstrate how Swiss sub-state political parties must respond to and prioritise contextual conflicts while adapting to their sub-state constituencies by considering regional socio-structural and ideological characteristics. It is worth noting that the SVP's sub-state cantonal branches still enjoy significant autonomy regarding the representation of the party's interests at the regional level (Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016).

I showed that, with respect to its sub-state cantonal party manifesto, the Geneva SVP focuses on making immigration controls stricter and prioritising local employment. In addition, the party blames the rise in social costs, rent and high unemployment on the canton's growing number of immigrants. By contrast, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP do not have their own manifesto but instead rely on the national one. This is surprising, given that the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP are the only ones among the 26 SVP sub-state cantonal branches operating in Switzerland not to provide a specific sub-state cantonal party manifesto (see Figure 7.1) and that the Basel region has a higher percentage of cross-border employment than the canton of Geneva (see Table 4.3).

Figure 7.1 – Overview of the Swiss borderland cantons where the SVP's sub-state cantonal branches have either a cantonal or a national party manifesto.
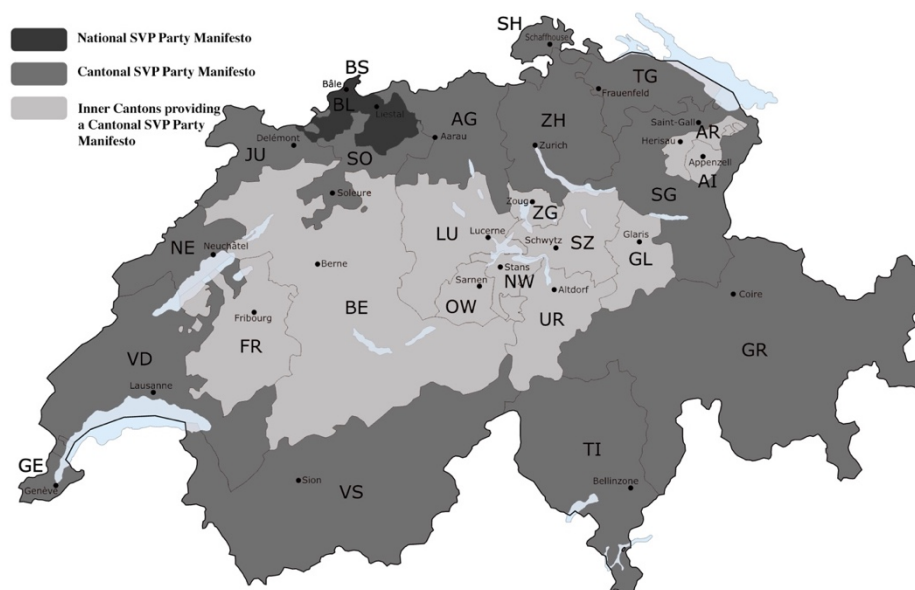
Source: Author

The absence of sub-state cantonal party manifestos for the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP can be attributed to various factors, including citizens' attitudes. Pilotti and Mazzoleni (2023) recently explored the path-dependency of cross-border issues from a citizen perspective and demonstrated that citizens living in the Basel region strongly support open regional borders and cross-border cooperation. This, in turn, could have an impact on the parties' ideological supply, as RWPPs operating in the Basel borderland may not need to cultivate cross-border grievances to maintain electoral success. Pascal Messerli, the current president of the Basel-City SVP, confirms this hypothesis and explains that the party lacks sufficient resources:

> The Basel-City SVP basically adheres to the party programme of the Swiss SVP, which also includes security, migration, transport, health, education and social issues. However, as a cantonal party with fewer resources, we currently don't have a cantonal party programme. Furthermore, the limitation initiative has not been rejected in any other canton as it was in Basel-City. As such, we must respect the people's decision on these issues. We're always in a certain conflict between economic and migration issues, both of which are important to us, and we must find a good balance. Finally, regarding security policies, we currently see little need for action when considering

cross-border workers. (Pascal Messerli, Basel-City SVP President, e-mail exchange, 6 March 2023)[28]

The Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country sub-state cantonal branches of the SVP operate in the Geneva and Basel borderlands, which are part of the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel cross-border regions (CBRs). As indicated in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), Geneva has the highest number of cross-border workers' share in Switzerland (27 per cent of the total influx), while the Basel region holds the third position with 17 per cent of the total (see Figure 4.9), even though the latter has a higher proportion of cross-border employment than the canton of Geneva.

As outlined in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4), the degrees of functional and institutional cross-border integration regarding the "regionalisation" of interests are not identical between the Geneva and Basel borderlands. Firstly, while regional functional integration with the other side of the border appears to be strong in both borderlands, stronger structural socio-economic differentials due to asymmetrical functional integration in the Greater Geneva CBR lead to high levels of anger and resentment among the Genevan population (Sohn 2020). This is not the case in the Basel borderland, where there appear to be no tensions between the border populations (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020). These findings align with those of Pilotti and Mazzoleni (2023), whose results indicate that the population in the Basel borderland supports open regional borders and cross-border cooperation. Secondly, when considering cross-border regional institutional integration, the Geneva borderland appears to be less institutionalised than its Basel counterpart (Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020; Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009).

Furthermore, when considering the "regionalisation" of territorial identity interests, the Basel borderland may encounter more difficulties in shaping a strong regional identity than Geneva. As argued by Mueller (2013), there are still controversies and disputes over whether Basel-City and Basel-Country should be unified, with a prevailing sense of independentism between the two after several direct-democratic decisions. In this context, the congruence of a strong and unified regional identity could be jeopardised. Conversely,

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[28] Unfortunately, despite repeated requests for an explanation from the Basel-Country SVP, there was no response. However, based on the findings of Pilotti and Mazzoleni's (2023) study and the fact that the share of cross-border workers in Basel-Country is lower than in Basel-City (as discussed in Chapter 4), we can hypothesise that cross-border issues and grievances are not pertinent to the Basel-Country SVP sub-state cantonal branch, similar to the case of the Basel-City SVP.

as argued by Poschet, Wust and Bassand (2002), the "regionalisation" of a strong shared regional identity seems to be more effective in the Geneva borderland.

For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on cantonal elections in the Geneva and Basel borderlands. In the 2018 cantonal elections, the Geneva SVP received 7.3 per cent (down from 10.6 per cent in the 2013 cantonal elections). The Basel-City SVP received 10.6 per cent of the vote in the 2020 cantonal elections (down from 13.8 per cent in the 2016 cantonal elections), while the Basel-Country SVP received 14 per cent in the 2019 cantonal elections (down from 16.4 per cent in the 2015 cantonal elections, in which it had been the most influential party in the cantonal government). As shown in Figure 7.2, when comparing the electoral strength between the three sub-state SVP cantonal branches, the Basel-Country has always been and continues to be the most powerful cantonal branch, followed by its Basel-City counterpart. By contrast, the Geneva SVP appears to be rather a weak force. As argued in the contextual framework (Chapter 4), this could be explained by the high level of internationalisation on the Genevan political landscape. Given this context, it is striking that the Basel-City and Basel-Country branches of the SVP do not have a regional party manifesto that would focus on regional grievances, despite their relatively strong electoral support.

Figure 7.2 – Electoral vote share (in per cent) of the Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP within their cantonal parliaments from 1971 to 2023
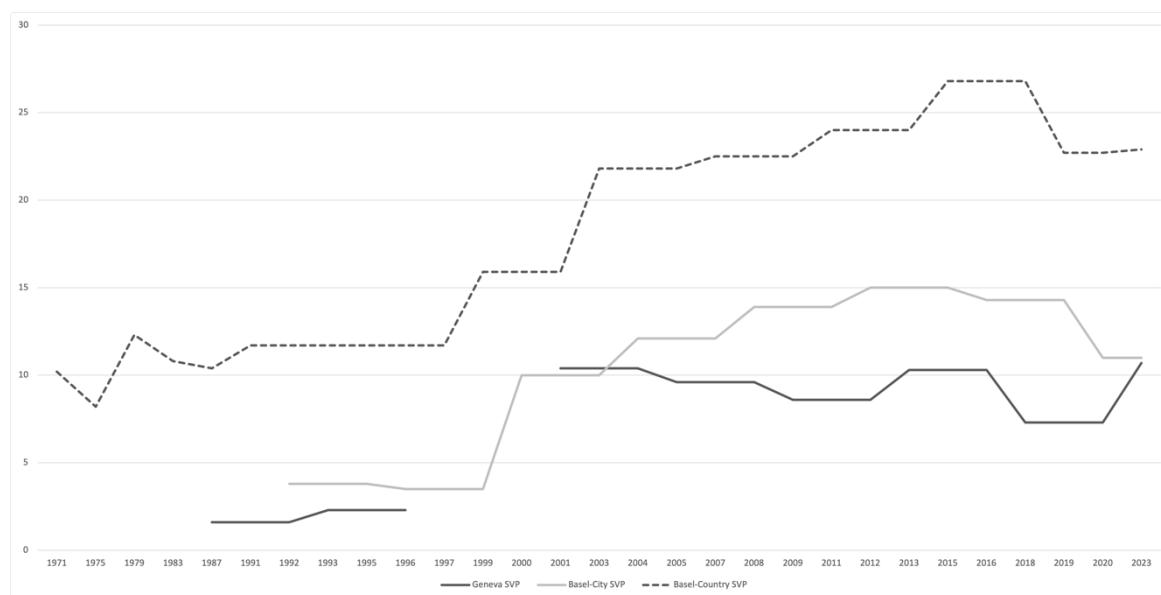
Note: The election years differ among Swiss cantons. For Geneva: 1987, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2018 and 2023. For Basel-City: 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020. For Basel-Country: 1971, 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023.

Source: Cantonal Statistical Offices of Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country

7.3. Methodology: Investigating Referential Strategies and Scales

This chapter focuses on referential strategies as an important linguistic means of investigating the discursive construction of borders by RWPPs. As argued in the methodological chapter (Chapter 3), the referential strategies aim to explore how the persons are referred to linguistically via membership categorisation of "us" versus "them" (i.e. the construction of in- and out-groups) by asking the following question: How are persons named and referred to linguistically? (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Wodak 2001a) Furthermore, I will examine referential strategies by using a scale analysis, that is, by exploring the (state-bordered region, cross-border region, national, European, global) scales at which the in- and out-groups (or people and elites) are discursively constructed.

The linguistic objective of this chapter is to explore the discourses' referential strategies to gain a better understanding of how sub-state RWPPs contribute to the symbolic construction of borders across multiple scales.

As the aim is to analyse the direct party communication, the corpus of data includes the manifestos of the SVP's sub-state cantonal parties. Party manifestos seem to be a compelling basis for exploring RWPPs' discourse because they provide the ideological platform or positions that parties focus on regarding specific issues during electoral campaigns. As argued by Braun and Schmitt (2020: 4), "we therefore can act on the assumption that the content of election manifestos reflects the official position that a party assumes on specific issues". Furthermore, in multi-level political systems, sub-state party manifestos are becoming more meaningful and valuable sources for understanding the ideological agendas of political parties concerning regional policy outcomes (Gross and Jankowski 2020). Table 7.1 displays the data corpus for each SVP sub-state cantonal party during their corresponding cantonal elections in the two CBRs.[29]

Table 7.1 – Party manifestos according to the canton's election year in the two borderlands

Borderland region	Geneva	Basel	
Canton	Geneva	Basel-City	Basel-Country
Cantonal election year	2018	2020	2019
Source	Geneva SVP party manifesto (2018-2023)	Swiss SVP party manifesto (2019-2023)	Swiss SVP party manifesto (2019-2023)

The party manifestos were coded and analysed with the help of the MAXQDA software, which has been used to identify the referential strategies when labelling the "us" and the "them" at stake in the texts. For this chapter, I differentiated between three dominant codes:

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[29] More recent sub-state cantonal elections were held in the cantons of Basel-Country and Geneva in 2023. However, for comparative purposes, I chose to focus on the 2018 election for the Geneva SVP and the 2019 election for the Basel-Country SVP. This is because there would be a significant gap if I used the most recent 2023 cantonal elections for both parties, particularly given the recent socio-political and historical turning point of the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, while the Geneva SVP presented a new cantonal party manifesto for the electoral period of 2023–2028, the Basel-Country SVP continued to use the national party manifesto.

1) the people (which categories of people are framed?), 2) the elites (which categories of elites are framed?) and 3) the scales (through which scales are the people and the elites framed?). The coding was run inductively, and to capture as many details as possible, the segments were coded without pre-formatted schemes from the literature. The scales code represents an essential analytical tool for this chapter. I identified five sub-categories in relation to the right-wing populist border framing in the party manifestos: the state-bordered region, the cross-border region and the national, European and global scales. According to those sub-categories, each segment of discourse was coded with its associated scales based on the territorial levels at which the people and the elites were framed.[30] Thus, I used the coding functionality and the code relation browser of MAXQDA (see Chapter 3), firstly to map the construction of in- and out-groups and their relating scales used to discursively shape borders, and secondly, with the help of the co-occurrence function, to explore at which scales the in- and out-groups were predominantly referred to.

7.4. Constructing the People and the Elites: Two Models of Right-Wing Populist Symbolic Multi-Scalar Border Framing

This section aims to empirically analyse how right-wing populist sub-state parties contribute to symbolically framing borders across multiple scales. Moreover, it examines how they discursively shape the notions of "the people" and "the elites" through their ideological supply.

As for the hypotheses, I expect that the various degrees of "regionalisation" of functional, institutional and territorial identity interests in each borderland will contribute to shaping a regional populist discourse either with or without regionalism and, thus, either a cross-regional or a cross-national border framing. As such, I expect that the right-wing populist discourse provided at the regional level in the Geneva borderland will be characterised as being with regionalism, as the Geneva borderland is characterised by asymmetrical

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[30] For example, if a segment focuses on a specific elite (e.g. the cantonal government) for freely allowing European economic migrants into the canton of Geneva, this segment is coded with the state-bordered region and the European scales.

functional integration with strong structural socio-economic differentials between both sides of the border. This leads to more cross-border grievances, a more moderate degree of institutional integration able to lock in regional interests and a stronger degree of shared regional identity, which would lead to a cross-regional border framing. By contrast, I hypothesise that the right-wing populist discourse provided at the regional level in the Basel borderland will be characterised as being without regionalism. This is because the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP do not provide a cantonal party manifesto. The Basel borderland is characterised by being among the best functionally integrated in the European landscape, with no tensions between the border populations (see Durand, Decoville, and Knippschild 2020). It has a strong degree of institutional integration and a more moderate degree of shared regional identity leading to more difficulties in locking in regional interests and constructing a strong regional territorial identity among the population. This would produce a cross-national border framing, leaving RWPPs with fewer or no opportunities to focus on cross-border regional grievances.

Tables 7.2 and 7.3 show how the people and the elites are discursively framed through multiple scales by the Geneva, the Basel-City and the Basel-Country SVP cantonal branches. For a representative output of the coding, I chose to report the categories of people by presenting the five highest numbers of coded segments and the categories of the elites by presenting the three highest numbers of coded segments. This difference depends on how many categories there are in relation to the codes of the people and the elites. There were many more codes representing the people than codes representing the elites. These results are in line with the right-wing populist strategy of fluidity and ambivalence (Biancalana and Mazzoleni 2020; Brubaker 2020). Indeed, RWPPs tend to increase the categories of people by adapting their discourse to the complexity of contemporary societies in order to reach the widest possible constituency.

7.4.1. The Geneva Borderland

Table 7.2 – Distribution of scales among the people and the elites in the Geneva SVP's party manifesto

PEOPLE

Code	Coded segments	Share of total coded segments	Scale's distribution for each code					
			State-bordered region	Cross-border region	National	European	Global	Total
Inhabitants	15	10.7%	57%	12%	4%	4%	23%	100%
Children	12	8.6%	60%	5%	5%	5%	25%	100%
Population/people	9	6.4%	75%	8%	-	-	17%	100%
Genevans	8	5.7%	73%	18%	-	-	9%	100%
Young people	6	4.3%	55%	18%	-	9%	18%	100%
Citizens	6	4.3%	43%	21%	-	7%	29%	100%
Women	6	4.3%	55%	-	9%	9%	27%	100%
Families	6	4.3%	86%	-	-	14%	-	100%

ELITES

Code	Coded segments	Share of total coded segments	Scale's distribution for each code					
			State-bordered region	Cross-border region	National	European	Global	Total
Cantonal government	25	50%	64%	10%	5%	8%	13%	100%
Other political parties	17	34%	58%	14%	-	7%	21%	100%
Federal public offices	3	6%	75%	-	25%	-	-	100%

According to the empirical findings in Table 7.2, the Geneva SVP discursively frames the people with extensive categories such as the population/people, citizens, inhabitants or young people through multiple scales. In this case, we can see that the space of dependence is evident at the state-bordered region scale, while the spaces of engagement are articulated

across the cross-border region, national, European and global scales. Example 1 shows how the Geneva SVP discursively frames the population/people by combining the state-bordered region and global scales. This example outlines how the party symbolically shapes the border by defending the population/people against criminals coming from abroad.

> **Example 1**
>
> Geneva must ensure the safety of its population and not attract all the criminals of the world with permissiveness, light sentences and an aversion to deportation. Other political parties have turned Geneva into an international prison hub. (Geneva SVP party manifesto, 2018-2023)

Interestingly, the party strongly discursively frames the category of Genevans, which underscores the Geneva SVP's regional anchorage. Furthermore, and in keeping with the SVP's traditional ideology, the party mostly discursively frames the categories of families, children and women as the ones that need to be protected against the threat of asylum seekers and the woes caused by the influx of migrants and the free movement of persons. Example 2 shows how the Geneva SVP discursively frames the inhabitants together with women and children by combining the state-bordered region and global scales. This example outlines how the party symbolically contributes to shaping the border by seeking to protect those categories of people against refugees:

> **Example 2**
>
> Current events [i.e. the building of refugee centres] show that we need to be cautious. The safety of our inhabitants, especially women and children, is our priority. (Geneva SVP party manifesto, 2018-2023)

The Geneva SVP discursively frames the elites across multiple scales to the same extent as it does for the category of the people. Example 3 shows how the party discursively frames the cantonal government by combining the state-bordered region and European scales. This example shows how the Geneva SVP symbolically contributes to shaping the border by criticising the cantonal government for the surge in European net migration in the canton. Example 4 shows how the party discursively frames other political parties (see also Example 1) by combining the state-bordered region, cross-border region and European scales. The example also indicates how this cantonal branch of the party symbolically shape the border by blaming other political parties for the canton's immigration woes.

Example 3

For the SVP, both the bilateral agreements and the deliberate will of the cantonal government not to implement the Foreign Nationals Act properly are responsible for the surge in net migration. This surge has catastrophic consequences for housing measures. (Geneva SVP party manifesto, 2018-2023)

Example 4

What do we owe other parties? Self-service immigration, illegal immigrants' laundering, cross-border crime, the surge in rents under migratory pressure, overcrowding in the canton, saturated infrastructures and a lawless area. (Geneva SVP party manifesto, 2018-2023)

Following these empirical findings, it is worth highlighting that the state-bordered region is the most significant meaningful scale for the Geneva SVP as it represents its space of dependence and the scale at which the party locks in its interests. This demonstrates how the party's contribution to the symbolic framing of borders through the discursive construction of the people and the elites can be characterised as a right-wing populist cross-regional border framing, with a regional right-wing populist discourse with regionalism. The dichotomy between the people and the elites is organised around the territorial entity of the region as a heartland to be protected.

7.4.2. The Basel Borderland

Table 7.3 – Distribution of scales among the people and the elites in the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP party manifestos (i.e. national SVP party manifesto)

PEOPLE

Code	Coded segments	Share of total coded segments	Scale's distribution for each code					
			State-bordered region	Cross-border region	National	European	Global	Total
Citizens	40	11.8%	-	-	63%	17%	20%	100%
Families	20	5.9%	-	-	80%	8%	12%	100%
Population/people	19	5.6%	-	-	79%	17%	4%	100%
Young people	14	4.1%	-	-	82%	12%	6%	100%

Consumers	14	4.1%	-	-	82%	6%	12%	100%
SMEs	14	4.1%	-	-	74%	16%	10%	100%
Taxpayers	13	3.8%	-	-	62%	14%	24%	100%
Employers	13	3.8%	-	-	82%	6%	12%	100%
Swiss people	13	3.8%	-	-	66%	17%	17%	100%

ELITES

Code	Coded segments	Share of total coded segments	Scale's distribution for each code					
			State-bordered region	Cross-border region	National	European	Global	Total
National government	96	53.9%	-	-	71%	12%	17%	100%
European Union	23	12.9%	-	-	42%	42%	16%	100%
Left-wing parties	12	6.7%	-	-	63%	11%	26%	100%

As the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP do not have regional party manifestos, both sub-state cantonal sections rely on the national SVP manifesto. Therefore, these parties tend to discursively frame the category of the Swiss people as a homogeneous entity. In this case, the space of dependence is at the national scale, while the spaces of engagement are articulated across the European and global scales. As such, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP also use more extensive categories, such as citizens, population/people or young people, to discursively frame the people through multiple scales. Example 5 shows how the parties discursively frame the population/people by combining the national and European scales. This example demonstrates how the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP symbolically shape the border by seeking to defend the opinion of the population/people regarding the autonomous management of immigration from EU economic workers. Example 6 shows the referential nomination of the citizens by combining national and European scales. This example outlines how the parties symbolically shape the border by aiming to defend Swiss citizens against European criminal gangs.

Example 5

The uncontrolled influx of foreigners coming from the EU threatens the jobs of older workers. Instead of qualified workers, it is mainly cheap workers and their families who

are invading Switzerland. The people's decision to regain autonomy over the management of immigration must prevail. (Swiss SVP party manifesto, 2019-2023)

Example 6

Switzerland has been the favourite destination for European criminal gangs for years. This has a direct impact on citizens' feeling of security. Many citizens no longer feel safe in Switzerland. (Swiss SVP party manifesto, 2019-2023)

According to the SVP's traditional ideology, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP discursively frame the categories of families, young people and SMEs as the ones requiring protection because of the costs they have to bear as a result of the agreements made with the EU. Furthermore, the parties discursively frame other categories of people such as taxpayers, consumers and employers. Example 7 illustrates how the Basel-City and Basel-Country branches of the SVP discursively frame the taxpayers by combining national and global scales. This example demonstrates how the SVP symbolically contributes to shaping the border by seeking to protect the taxpayers from the costs generated by refugees.

Example 7

By completely financing the stay of economic refugees with taxpayers' contributions, the national government is actually encouraging these people to pretend to be 'refugees' and, thus, is behaving unfairly towards those people who respect our immigration laws. (Swiss SVP party manifesto, 2019-2023)

To the same extent as for the category of the people, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP discursively frame the elites through multiple scales: national, European and global. The parties discursively frame the elites by using categories such as the national government, the EU and left-wing parties. Example 8 shows how the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP frame the European Union by combining national and European scales. This example indicates how the parties symbolically shape the border by criticising the EU for undermining Swiss sovereignty. Example 9 shows how the Basel-City and Basel-Country branches of the SVP discursively frame the national government by combining national and global scales, and the example illustrates how the parties symbolically shape the border by criticising the national government for relying on international law to undermine people's determination.

Example 8

The SVP is committed to protecting an independent and neutral Switzerland. The political elites' selling out of Swiss sovereignty must cease. We must prevent the annexation of our country by international structures such as the EU. (Swiss SVP party manifesto, 2019-2023)

Example 9

The national government wants to take away citizens' [ability to have the] final say in political decisions. To achieve it and invalidate popular decisions, they have discovered a miracle recipe: international law. (Swiss SVP party manifesto, 2019-2023)

Based on these empirical findings and the use of the national SVP manifesto, it is evident that the national scale is meaningful for the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP as it represents their space of dependence where their interests are locked in. They do not discursively frame the people and the elites through state-bordered region and cross-border region scales. These findings demonstrate how the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP contribute to the symbolical framing of borders in a right-wing populist, cross-national way, with a right-wing populist regional discourse without regionalism. The dichotomy between the people and the elites is organised around the territorial entity of the nation as a heartland that needs to be protected.

7.4.3. Two Diverging Spaces of Dependence. What About Spaces of Engagement? Investigating the Jumping Scale Strategies

As demonstrated in the previous sections, two distinct spaces of dependence are evident in the discourse of the Geneva SVP, on the one hand, and the discourse of the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP, on the other hand. The space of dependence for the Geneva SVP unfolds at the state-bordered region scale, while for the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP, it unfolds at the national scale. This results in the shaping of two different models of right-wing populist symbolic multi-scalar border framing (i.e. cross-regional and cross-national), with regional right-wing populist discourses characterised either with or without regionalism. Despite the difference in spaces of dependence, both RWPPs operating in the two borderlands discursively frame similar in-groups, such as citizens, families, population/people and young people. This section aims to provide empirical examples of

how RWPPs in the two borderlands use the jumping scale strategy in relation to the various territorial scales used in spaces of engagement and how the different models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing unfold.

One similarity between the two case studies is that all RWPPs focus on the category of citizens to lock in their territorial interests, predominantly by using the global scale as a space of engagement. The Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP use the global scale relating to various concerns, such as foreign policy, economy, asylum, security or energy, while the Geneva SVP uses it in relation to concerns like asylum, economy, employment and housing. For instance, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP typically discursively frame the category of citizens through the global scale by aiming to defend them against foreign policy pressures (Example 10). By contrast, the Geneva SVP characteristically discursively frames the same category through the global scale with the aim of defending citizens' rights regarding affordable housing (Example 11).

> **Example 10**
>
> [The SVP aims to provide] citizens with greater independence from foreign policies and international prices and, thus, reduce their exposure to foreign pressure. (Swiss SVP party manifesto, 2019-2023)

> **Example 11**
>
> The Geneva SVP commits to providing affordable housing for Geneva citizens and young people by controlling foreign immigration. (Geneva SVP party manifesto, 2018-2023)

When considering other similar in-groups between the two cases (i.e. families, population/people and young people), the RWPPs lock in the territorial interests of these categories by engaging through dissimilar predominant scales. The Geneva SVP tends to engage with the European scale, while the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP tend to engage with the global scale. For example, the Geneva SVP typically discursively frames the categories of families and young people through the European scale in relation to the theme of employment. Example 12 shows how the party aims to defend families against cheaper EU workers. By contrast, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP discursively frame these categories through the global scale in relation to concerns such as the economy, the army, security and agriculture. Example 13 shows how the parties aim to defend young people against foreign criminal gangs.

Example 12

The issue of non-resident EU workers is important to consider. In just a few years, the number of non-resident EU workers has doubled, and the total share of jobs they occupy has increased. The people and families of Geneva are being left behind as the free movement of persons is pushing them out of the labour market. (Geneva SVP party manifesto, 2018–2023)

Example 13

Foreign criminal gangs have made Switzerland their favourite destination. This has a direct impact on citizens' sense of security, and many no longer feel safe in Switzerland. Women no longer dare to walk the streets at night. Young people, especially young women, are threatened or even physically attacked when they go out at night. (Swiss SVP party manifesto, 2019–2023)

Finally, in terms of the discursive framing of out-groups, the Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP predominantly use the global scale to lock in their interests, although with diverging categories of out-groups in mind: The Geneva SVP typically discursively frames the cantonal government and other political parties, focusing on issues such as immigration, asylum, security or welfare through the global scale. Example 14 shows how the party criticises the cantonal government for allowing illegal immigrants to settle in Geneva. By contrast, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP discursively frame the national government and left-wing parties on concerns such as foreign policy, economy, asylum, security, the army and transport through the global scale. Example 15 shows how the parties discursively frame the category of left-wing parties as harmful by allegedly allowing immigrants and Islamists to invade the country.

Example 14

We know that if thousands of illegal immigrants were regularised, new people attracted by the idea of a better future would be tempted to come to Geneva and enjoy regularisation. The cantonal government is complicit by not fighting against illegal migration. (Geneva SVP party manifesto, 2018–2023)

Example 15

Left-wing parties have a disturbed relationship with the homeland. Their masochistic behaviour towards Switzerland is detrimental to our country and integration. When one refuses to commit to one's country, one should not be surprised to see the emergence of parallel societies among foreign immigrants or even extremist movements, such as political Islam, occupy the empty space. (Swiss SVP party manifesto, 2019–2023)

In conclusion, this section aimed to demonstrate how the jumping scale strategy is employed by RWPPs to secure their territorial interests in the two case studies. While the spaces of dependence differ, the Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP shape similar in-groups while engaging with diverging scales when considering the spaces of engagement. Conversely, the RWPPs shape dissimilar out-groups while engaging with the same predominant scales.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to explore how the sub-state branches of RWPPs in two distinct borderlands construct symbolic borders through multiple scales and how this leads to two different models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing. To this end, I analysed how SVP sub-state cantonal parties discursively framed the people and the elites in their party manifestos during sub-state cantonal elections. Such a perspective makes it possible to challenge the taken-for-granted state-centric approach that considers territorial borders as objective facts (Rumford 2012).

Accordingly, RWPPs operating in borderlands and CBRs are important actors because they contribute to the symbolic construction of borders (Brambilla 2015). This is the case when they discursively frame the people against the elites by legitimising a symbolic border between "us" and "them" and, thus, by reproducing territorial logics through the in- and out-group membership categorisation (Wodak 2015; Basile and Mazzoleni 2020; Casaglia et al. 2020). Indeed, the changing perspectives produced, among others, by globalisation and increasing transnationalism allow RWPPs in borderlands to discursively shape borders by mobilising multiple territorial scales to deal with various territorialities and border meanings (Perrier Bruslé 2013).

Firstly, the SVP's sub-state cantonal parties in the Geneva and Basel borderlands construct symbolic borders by using jumping scale strategies to discursively frame the people and the elites through multiple scales. By defending the people against the elites, right-wing populist sub-state parties reproduce territorial logics because they frame bounded territories as containers that must be protected (Paasi 2013; Casaglia et al. 2020). In this regard, right-wing populist sub-state parties symbolically reconfigure the border as a marker of

sovereignty and a filter of protection in relation to an endangered heartland, where the elites are scapegoated for allowing a whole range of outside threats to endanger the very existence of the "pure" people (Taggart 2000; Pelinka 2013; Wodak 2015; Varga 2016).

After exploring two different case studies, the empirical findings reveal the emergence of two distinct models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing by right-wing populist parties. On the one hand, the Geneva SVP fosters a right-wing populist cross-regional border framing, or a regional discourse with regionalism, to defend a regional bounded community (including Genevans) by providing a cantonal party manifesto. The space of dependence unfolds at the state-bordered region scale, and the antagonism between the people and the elites is constructed by protecting the Genevan people and other regional in-groups from cross-border, national, European and global threats (spaces of engagement). On the other hand, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP foster a right-wing populist cross-national border framing, or a regional discourse without regionalism, by relying on the SVP national party manifesto to defend a nationally bounded community (including the Swiss people). The space of dependence unfolds at the national scale, and the antagonism between the people and the elites is constructed by protecting the Swiss people and other national in-groups from European and global threats (spaces of engagement). In this case, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP consider the nation-state as the most relevant territorial unit to protect. These results demonstrate how different types of symbolic multi-scalar border framing could emerge in two distinct borderlands while exploring RWPPs characterised as both centralised and decentralised.

As expected, the two models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing seem to be related to the contextual political opportunities and constraints in terms of socio-political and territorial settings, depending on the different degrees of the "regionalisation" of interest rescaling. As mentioned, the Basel borderland has a strong history of cross-border regional institutionalisation and is considered an example of best practices among European borderland regions. The Geneva borderland has a more moderate level of cross-border regional institutionalisation and presents a strong asymmetrical model of cross-border functional integration, where the collective perception of the border as a resource among the population puts pressure on certain asymmetries (Sohn, Reitel and Walther 2009; Dubois 2019; Durand, Decoville and Knippschild 2020). Additionally, the rescaling of territorial interests in shaping a shared regional identity could be more challenging in the Basel borderland, considering the controversies surrounding the unification of the cantons

of Basel-City and Basel-Country (Mueller 2013). By contrast, the Geneva borderland is characterised by a strong shared sense of regional territorial identity (Poschet, Wust and Bassand 2002).

According to empirical findings, there are few or no opportunities for the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP to prioritise the regional entity through right-wing populist cross-regional border framing or by providing a regional discourse with regionalism. As there appear to be no issues that distinguish the sub-state cantonal parties from the national level, they offer a right-wing populist cross-national border framing or a regional discourse without regionalism. The sub-state cantonal parties defend the Basel borderland as part of the nation against foreign elites, such as the EU, rather than as an autonomous region.

By contrast, the more moderate level of regional institutionalisation in the Geneva borderland, combined with asymmetrical functional integration and a stronger shared regional identity, presents an opportunity for the Geneva SVP to discursively frame the people and the elites through the territorial entity of the region. Consequently, the party provides a right-wing populist, cross-regional border framing, or a regional discourse with regionalism, by defending the region as an autonomous heartland to be protected. Moreover, the presence of the MCG on the Genevan political landscape could enable the Geneva SVP to focus more on regional issues when competing in cantonal elections (see Hepburn 2014 on multi-level party competition).

This chapter sought to fill gaps in the literature by deepening empirical studies focused on RWPPs in borderlands and CBRs and on how RWPPs deal with territorial borders according to their ideological supply. It highlighted the importance of considering the revitalisation of sub-state political arenas in which political parties play a significant role, as they could nurture regional political mobilisations (Hepburn 2009; Detterbeck 2012; Keating 2014; Mazzoleni and Mueller 2017). Consequently, RWPPs can strategically shift the meaning of the people and the elites at different and multiple scales by producing a multi-level populism that discursively constructs the antagonism between the people and the elites at different territorial scales in response to the proliferation of political action loci (Mazzoleni 2005; 2017; Heinisch, Holtz-Bacha, and Mazzoleni 2021). As such, this chapter aimed to deepen knowledge of how RWPPs adapt their discourse in multi-level electoral systems, which has so far been under-researched at the academic level (Braun and Schmitt 2020). Finally, the scope of this empirical contribution was to stress how RWPPs "produce particular

understandings of territory and sovereignty that can transform or even radically overturn the status quo from the local to the global" (Casaglia et al. 2020: 2).

8. Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to examine how right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) discursively shape and (re)produce territorial borders. I argued that the existing literature on right-wing populism has overlooked this aspect of the parties' rhetoric and that there is a lack of systematic theoretical and empirical research on the elective affinity between right-wing populism and borders.

One of the main assumptions of this research was that the field of political science – and more specifically, the study of right-wing populism and party politics – is still normatively embedded in and locked into a nationalist perspective that avoids the complexity of contemporary multi-scalar territorial and political configurations, which extend beyond a national rationale.

In this context, I proposed an interdisciplinary and constructivist theoretical framework that combines political science, border studies and political geography from a linguistic perspective. This theoretical framework sought to reflect on the intertwined relationship between right-wing populism and borders to gain a better understanding of how RWPPs shape and (re)produce territorial borders through their bordering discourse. To avoid the pitfalls of methodological nationalism and the territorial trap, which endorse a normative, state-centred and nationalist perspective (Agnew 1994; 2008; Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), this approach aimed to fill theoretical and empirical gaps by emphasising the importance of adopting a territory-oriented approach in the study of right-wing populism and party politics (see Mazzoleni, forthcoming). To this end, I deployed a cross-border perspective by investigating cross-border regional contexts that can be considered multi-scalar and multi-dimensional spaces of mobilisation (Massetti 2009). In such transnational spaces characterised by the multi-dimensionality of social, political, economic and cultural realms, the border meanings are multiple and discursively constructed through various territorial scales (Laine 2021; Sohn 2016).

It has been argued that borders should not be considered simply as static and national manifestations but as discursive entities shaped and constructed by various actors at different scales (Casaglia 2020; Laine 2016; Perrier Bruslé 2013; Scott 2020b). Accordingly, I provided a threefold conceptual perspective by defining, in turn, the concepts

of border issues, bordering narratives and multi-scalar border framing to empirically and heuristically explore the right-wing populist discursive construction of borders.

Results show that RWPPs have used nativist body politics, the politics of fear, politics of insecurity, politics of emotion and resentment, identity politics and economic politics and policies to discursively (re)define the need for a border imperative in both physical and symbolical realms at different and various scales, from sub-national to global, by stressing the need to protect endangered territories from both internal and external threats. In addition, the three empirical chapters demonstrated that RWPPs have successfully created a sense of crisis, particularly by discursively constructing territorial borders as proxies for reinforcing and/or closing borders, restoring territorial sovereignty and consolidating the Manichean division between "us" and "them".

Chapter 5 examined what kind of border issues were at stake in the right-wing populist discourse of the Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP, as well as the MCG and the RN Ain/Haute-Savoie and Haut-Rhin in the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results showed that RWPPs used both direct and indirect border issues. However, they did so in different ways. The differences could depend on a range of factors, including the parties' ideological positions and organisational structures, the institutional, functional and structural dynamics at play in the different CBRs and the political and party systems in which the parties operate. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic context seems to have provided a fertile ground for RWPPs to reinforce the normative justification of the border as either a wall or a symbolic tool to defend the population against "others" by benefitting from the partial closure of state borders.

Chapter 6 explored the discursive construction of bordering narratives relating to migration and borders by the Geneva SVP and the MCG in the Geneva borderland during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results demonstrated that bordering narratives were context-dependent, varying depending on the different phases of the pandemic (i.e. before, during and after the partial closure of state borders). RWPPs appear to have used the crisis to reinforce the imaginary of the border as a form of protection and a wall against intruders in a radicalised re-bordering narrative. This radicalised re-bordering narrative was constructed by reinforcing and (re)affirming the parties' long-standing demands for tighter migration and border controls and by providing specific context-dependent argumentation strategies involving the topics of health care, criminality, security, permissiveness and sovereignty linked to the Covid-19 pandemic context. Furthermore, the results showed that differences

in the discursive construction of bordering narratives could pertain to the different ideological supply, or ideological agendas, that the parties provide.

Chapter 7 investigated how the Geneva, Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP discursively constructed borders through multiple scales when constructing a Manichean division between the people and the elites during the sub-state cantonal elections. The results showed that two different models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing emerged (i.e. cross-national and cross-regional), with RWPPs shaping the people and the elites through either the territorial entity (or space of dependence) of the nation or the region, leading to a regional bordering discourse without regionalism for the former and a regional bordering discourse with regionalism for the latter. These two models appear to correspond to the opportunities and constraints provided by the different "regionalisation" degrees of functional, institutional and territorial identity interests at play in the different borderlands.

The empirical chapters emphasise the importance of considering contextual backgrounds when exploring the discourses of RWPPs. The internal ideological agendas and party structures, on the one hand, and the broader context of socio-political dynamics, on the other hand, seem to explain how RWPPs could provide specific and diverging discursive patterns on specific issues (see Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017). In this vein, we saw that the different contextual backgrounds in which the various RWPPs operated provide different outcomes in the discursive construction of borders, depending on exogenous and endogenous opportunities and constraints.

We saw in Chapters 5 and 7 that there has been a diverging discursive construction of border issues and multi-scalar border framing between sub-state cantonal branches of the same party and in the same country (i.e. the Geneva SVP, on the one hand, and the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP, on the other hand). In this context, I argued that the various degrees of cross-border integration between the Greater Geneva and Eurodistrict of Basel CBRs and the distinct ideological supply, as well as the different "regionalisation" degrees of interest rescaling between the two borderlands of Geneva and Basel, could have played an important role in providing different discursive outcomes. Chapter 5 also showed the discursive construction of border issues between different RWPPs operating in the same CBR but in different national contexts lead to dissimilar discursive practices. The specific institutional and structural features of the respective national political and party systems, on the one hand, and the divergences in party organisations, on the other hand, seem to have had a major impact on the different ways of discursively constructing borders. Finally,

Chapter 6 demonstrated that two RWPPs in the same borderland could provide diverging bordering narratives resulting from their diverging articulations of ideological agendas.

Moreover, the empirical chapters showed that RWPPs defined singular spatialised territories and sovereignties by discursively shaping borders through multiple scales. They accomplished this by providing a multi-level populism that unfolded through the use of multiple scales when shaping their bordering discourses according to the territorial and socio-political opportunities and constraints that they face. Against this backdrop, we observed that the Geneva SVP and the MCG extensively shaped their bordering discourses through multiple scales with a focus on the regional scale. Meanwhile, the Basel-City and Basel-Country SVP, as well as the sub-state RN local branches of Ain/Haute-Savoie and Haut-Rhin in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Grand Est regions, extensively constructed borders in a multi-scalar fashion, albeit with a pronounced national anchorage.

Thus, in the various empirical chapters, I expected that specific contextual factors would explain the multiplicity of right-wing populist bordering discourses considering border issues, bordering narratives and symbolic multi-scalar border framing. What lessons can be learned from this thesis to understand how right-wing populist bordering discourses unfold in CBRs? The answer is that context matters and plays an important role. Again and again, it has been argued that RWPPs depend on and must adapt to the multi-level contextual opportunities and constraints affecting their discursive practices (Heinisch, Holtz-Bacha and Mazzoleni 2021; Scott 2020b; Wirth et al. 2016). Furthermore, these multi-level contextual opportunities and constraints pertain to both endogenous and exogenous conditions (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021; Vollmer 2021). But what kinds of context matter?

Firstly, when considering endogenous conditions, the thesis demonstrated that the (de)centralisation of party organisational structures and the internal ideologies provided by RWPPs appear to contribute to shaping different bordering discourses. Secondly, when considering exogenous conditions, temporal and spatial contextual backgrounds must be taken into consideration to explain the diversity of right-wing populist bordering discourses. On the one hand, from a temporal perspective, the contextual historical continuities and ruptures or socio-political turning points – such as the Covid-19 or regional sub-state elections – seem to have influenced the right-wing populist performance of crisis, affecting in turn the discursive construction of multi-scalar borders as sacralised tools for the containment of a sovereign territorial unity. On the other hand, from a spatial perspective,

the specific territory-grounded socio-political contexts in which RWPPs evolve and compete must be taken into consideration, as they seem to be important triggers in shaping distinct bordering discourses. Indeed, spatial variations relating not only to political and social but also to cultural, institutional and economic contextual backgrounds seem to have contributed to the variation of right-wing populist bordering discourses. In this vein, the national political and party systems, the several degrees of cross-border functional, institutional and structural integration and the "regionalisation" degrees of functional, institutional and territorial identity interests seem to have been explanatory factors for the multiple expressions of right-wing populist bordering discourses.

In summary, the thesis showed that there appears to be a correlation between these endogenous and exogenous factors in explaining the diverse forms in the framing, emergence and deployment of different types of right-wing populist bordering discourse through multiple scales (see Figure 8.1). These factors seem to have contributed to shaping distinct, territory-grounded border issues, argumentation strategies and models of symbolic multi-scalar border framing.

Figure 8.1 – Endogenous and exogenous factors appearing to influence right-wing populist bordering discourses in CBRs
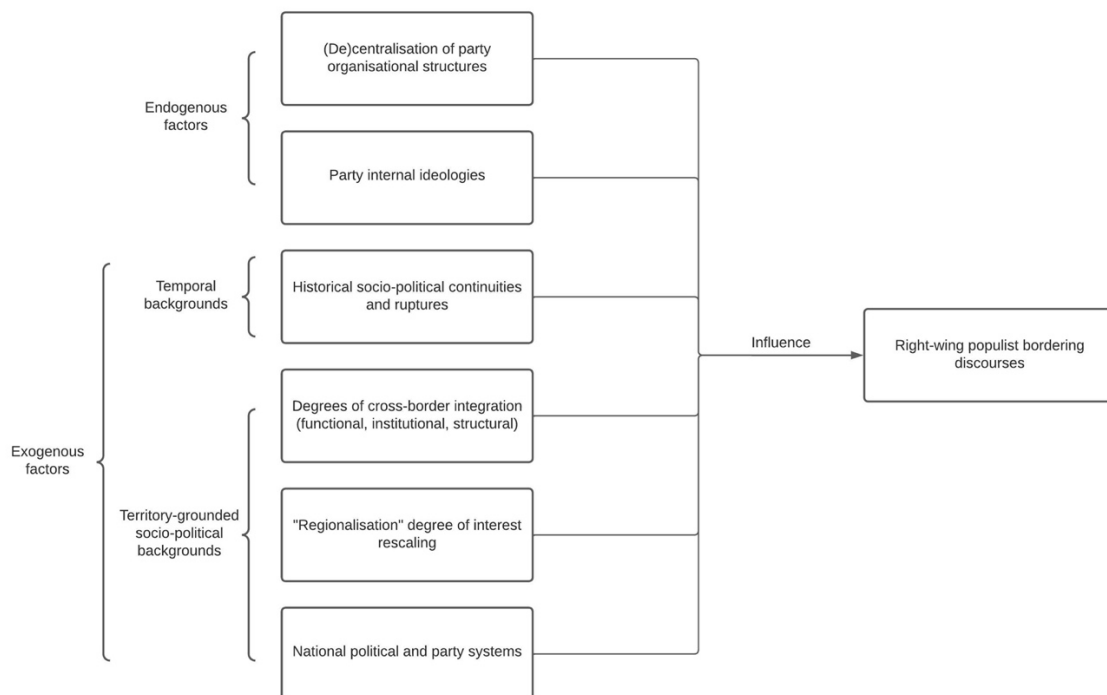
Source: Author

Thus, this conclusion aims to provide a framework relating to the contextual backgrounds that should be taken into consideration when exploring the various manifestations of right-wing populist bordering discourses in CBRs. The thesis follows the rationale that discourses cannot be understood without considering the context(s) in which they are performed. Furthermore, it demonstrates that these contextual factors are multifaceted and heterogeneous, reflecting the complexity of social and political reality.

By contrast, when considering the material influence of discourses, I outlined in the methodological chapter (Chapter 3) that discourse is also an important element in shaping social and political reality through a dialectical relationship. In the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), I stressed that RWPPs can have a material impact on agenda setting, voting behaviour and the shaping of public policies. I also provided a few examples of the material impact of the RWPPs under investigation in the contextual chapter (Chapter 4). However, further study is needed to examine the material repercussions of the right-wing populist bordering discourses explored in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

As mentioned, the general aim of this thesis was to get a better understanding of RWPPs' discursive construction of borders. Given the ongoing complex political, social and cultural challenges and cleavages that we face, this quest is of the utmost importance, as right-wing populist discourses have a normative impact: for instance, when considering the shaping of geopolitical practices and the understanding of territorial configurations relating to borders (Cole and Dodds 2021). Obviously, and according to one of the flagships of the DHA, the parties are not only influenced by the context in which they operate but also participate in influencing and shaping, in turn, the social and political reality in which they are embedded in a dialectical relationship.

Accordingly, this thesis contributed to revealing and unmasking some aspects of RWPPs' discursive construction of borders relating to various social, historical and political contextual backgrounds by transcending the purely linguistic dimension of discourse. Broadly, this can serve as a normative point of reference to counter and reflect on the ongoing normalisation of right-wing populist ideologies and discourses (Reisigl 2017). As argued by Wodak (2021b: xiii):

> Taking a step back, creating space and time for reflection may allow us to develop a better understanding of ongoing political processes, which always have to be contextualized historically. At the same time, only a systematic micro-analysis, the tracing of small and gradual discursive transformations and recontextualizations, allows detecting

continuities, concrete ruptures and shifts which, in relation to macro-developments, can play different roles: Sometimes then accompany the large-scales changes, sometimes they precede them and sometimes they follow them.

The various limitations of this thesis provide useful insights for outlining a future research agenda focused on the study of right-wing populist bordering discourses. Firstly, the case studies only consider the direct and public communication of RWPPs embedded in the fields of action of party-internal development of an informed opinion and political advertising, marketing and propaganda through the genres of parties' electoral programmes, slogans, statements, brochures, flyers and digital communication. However, it is important to acknowledge that the direct and public communication of RWPPs represents only one side of the coin. Further research could explore broader fields of action and genres, considering the interdiscursive and intertextual relationships between discourses originating from the diverse institutional fields.

Secondly, the case studies only focus on the Greater Geneva and Basel CBRs, which are among the best integrated in the European landscape. Further studies could explore other CBRs – even beyond the European Union – to examine whether similar or dissimilar patterns of right-wing populist bordering discourses are (re)produced and shaped, based on the enactment of the endogenous and exogenous opportunities and constraints depicted in Figure 8.1. While some studies have already delved into the peculiarities of the right-wing populist discursive framing of borders and cross-border grievances in CBRs (among others, see Biancalana and Mazzoleni 2023; Lamour and Carls 2022; Pilotti and Mazzoleni 2023), further research is needed and encouraged to develop a typology of the specific combinations of these endogenous and exogenous factors contributing to the formation of specific overlapping right-wing populist bordering discourses.

Thirdly, the case studies analyse the contextual macro-level's dimensions of the Covid-19 pandemic and Swiss sub-state cantonal elections as major temporal socio-political turning points. I argued in favour of taking both contexts into consideration. Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic represented a crisis rupture point in political, economic, social and cultural terms, and secondly, sub-state electoral periods are important for RWPPs to provide their core positions on specific issues relating to their ideological agenda. However, other contextual macro-level dimensions should also be taken into account to further explore the discursive shifts occurring diachronically in the right-wing populist construction of borders. As such,

it would be worth examining other crises (e.g. the 2015 European refugee crisis) or election periods in order to better reflect on the array of similarities and dissimilarities that RWPPs discursively provide over time and in distinct surroundings.

In conclusion, this thesis aimed to contribute not only to the field of political science, particularly in the areas of populism and party politics, but also to enrich the existing literature on critical border studies, political geography and critical discourse analysis. The theoretical framework demonstrated the complementary nature of these disciplines and emphasised the importance of an interdisciplinary approach, with the right-wing populist discourse being recognised as a central component in the construction of discourses relating to territorial borders.

The empirical chapters provided a diligent investigation into the spatial foundations of right-wing populism, thereby contributing to enriching the focus on the spatial aspects of populism, which is still empirically lacking in the fields of political geography and critical border studies (see Lizotte 2019). Furthermore, by connecting and epistemologically understanding key concepts such as borders, sovereignty, territories and scales in relation to populism, the thesis aimed to enhance our understanding of the role that RWPPs play in shaping a specific understanding of territorial borders and *vice-versa* (see Casaglia et al. 2020). Finally, regarding the literature on critical discourse analysis, I noted that there has been limited attention given to the importance of right-wing populist bordering discourse as a critical component in shaping social and political reality.

I hope that this thesis has made a valuable contribution to expanding both theoretical and empirical developments within these different literatures. Moreover, my goal with this work was to provide a better understanding, both in theory and in practice, of how right-wing populism and borders should be considered a magnetic nexus impacting contemporary multi-scalar territorial politics.

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