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***'How do Dutch Populist Parties frame sustainability: A framing analysis of the
2023 Dutch elections'***

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Abstract

The increasing prominence of populist parties poses significant challenges for firms navigating their non-market environments, particularly concerning complex issues like sustainability. This thesis investigates how Dutch populist parties discursively construct sustainability and what strategic framing strategies they employ. In doing so, addressing a research gap on the intersection of political discourse and firms' non-market environments. The study employs a qualitative frame analysis of six Dutch populist parties' 2023 election manifestos, guided by a multi-layered framework of political, populist and strategic management theories. The findings reveal that Dutch populism is not set in stone. Contrarily, distinct narratives emerge: some parties frame sustainability through a lens of social justice and corporate fairness, others treat it as a technical problem requiring pragmatic management, while a third group constructs it as an illegitimate, elite-driven threat to the nation. This research contributes a nuanced, country-specific analysis integrating political and strategic perspectives. The study concludes that understanding the competing frames is crucial for policymakers and firms seeking to navigate the non-market environment more effectively.

Keywords: Populism, Framing Theory, Sustainability, Strategic Management, Non-Market Strategy, Political Discourse, Dutch Politics, Frame Analysis

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Table of Contents	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Theoretical Frame	5
2.1 Strategic Discourse, Mission Statements and Framing	5
2.2 Framing Theory	7
2.3 Populism	8
2.4 Sustainability	10
3. Methods	12
3.1. Research Design	12
3.1.1 Qualitative Frame Analysis	12
3.1.2 Data Sampling	12
3.1.3 Analytical Framework	13
3.2 Data Collection and Analysis	15
3.2.1 Data Collection	15
3.2.2 Data Analysis Process	15
3.3 Limitations and Biases	17
4. Results	19
4.1 Overarching Narratives of Sustainability Framing	19
4.2 Sustainability as a Socio-Economic Justice Problem (SP)	19
4.3 Sustainability as a Governance and Management Problem (BBB, JA21)	21
4.4 Sustainability as an Illegitimate, External Threat to the Nation (PVV, FVD, BVNL)	23
4.5 Cross-Cutting Themes and Overall Patterns	25
4.5.1 Qualitative Prominence Matrix: Dominant Frames Across Narratives	25
5. Discussion and Conclusion	27
5.1 Discussion	27
5.1.1 Contribution to Science	27
5.1.2 Contribution to Society	29
5.1.3 Methodological Reflection	30
5.2 Conclusion	31
5.2.1 Concluding Remarks	31
5.2.2 Suggestions for Future Research	32
6. Reference list	33
7. Appendix	38
7.1 Appendix A: Operationalization Tables	38
7.2 Appendix B: Code lists	41

1. Introduction

The escalating presence of populist parties across political landscapes holds profound strategic implications for businesses operating within increasingly complex non-market environments. The rise of populist parties has been clearly demonstrated in the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023, where populist parties captured 53 of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives (Van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2024; Duina & Zhou, 2024). This shift in the Dutch parliament raises critical questions about how these populist parties deal with pressing global issues like sustainability (Lockwood, 2018). This trend is not a distant political phenomenon. For businesses, it is a pressing strategic challenge (Lawton et al., 2012). The discourse surrounding sustainability actively shapes the non-market environment of firms, influencing regulations and institutional pressures that dictates their strategy and performance (Baron, 1995). Therefore, developing a robust understanding of this political discourse and the ability to anticipate its shifts is a crucial element of integrated strategy for firms (Lawton et al., 2012).

Political parties engage in strategic discourse to define their identity, articulate a vision and position themselves on key issues (David & David, 2017; Hill & Jones, 2008). In this context, their manifestos function as strategic texts similar to corporate mission statements (Hill & Jones, 2008). These manifestos are not simply a list of policy points, but are carefully crafted discursive instruments that are designed to construct a particular version of reality (Shapiro, 1990). This to secure stakeholder buy-in, voters in this context (Klingemann et al., 2006). The central mechanism here is 'Framing,' the process of selecting specific parts of an issue and making them more salient (Entman, 1993). In the process promoting a particular problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). Besides the communication aspect of the frame there is also the strategic implementation of the frames within the political discourse (Hahn et al., 2014; Cornelissen et al., 2014). Understanding the interaction between the political discourse and the different frames employed in their manifestos is crucial for getting an insight into the political non-market forces firms will face (Baron, 1995).

While existing studies have effectively documented the presence of climate skepticism among right-wing populists (Forchtner & Kølvråa, 2015; Lockwood, 2018), as well as the populist rejection of environmental governance (Huber et al., 2021). These studies often use a very broad approach, trying to generalize for the whole populist spectrum. This leaves a need for a focused, in depth analysis that is able to incorporate specific institutional and cultural dynamics at a national level. Furthermore, existing research on populism focuses heavily on right-wing populism, often neglecting left-wing and other forms of populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Crucially, these limitations in existing political discourse analysis translate into a significant gap for strategic management, hindering a nuanced understanding of how political actors shape the institutional environments of firms.

This creates a significant theoretical gap for strategic management: a need for deeper integration of political science insights into the study of non-market strategy. Strategic management has been aware of the importance of analyzing the political environment for strategic purposes (Baron, 1995). There however remains an opportunity to enrich this analysis by deeply integrating the ideological and discursive insights found in political science. Strategic management literature acknowledges the presence of institutional pressures but does not explore in enough detail how these pressures are constructed, contested and shaped by political actors (Schmidt, 2008). There is insufficient integration how populist political actors shape the discourse and thus the non-market environment and why specific strategic tools get deployed. This research gap directly addresses existing calls for a more politically-grounded approach to non-market strategy (Doh et al., 2012; Lawton et al., 2012).

This thesis addresses these integrational gaps by conducting a qualitative framing analysis by examining how Dutch populist parties discursively construct sustainability in their 2023 election manifestos. By examining a multi-spectrum sample of populist parties this study provides an in-depth analysis of the Dutch populist context. The study occupies the theoretical gap by employing a multi-layered framework that draws from framing theory (Entman, 1993), populism literature (Mudde, 2004; Forchtner, 2020) and strategic management literature (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Hahn et al., 2014). This approach leads to an exploration between political rhetoric and strategic framing, allowing for a deconstruction of the populist political discourse evident in the 2023 elections and its implications for the non-market environment of firms. This leads us to the following research question:

‘How do populist parties discursively construct sustainability, and what strategic framing mechanisms can be identified in their political communication?’

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework, discussing the alignment with strategic management literature, framing theory, populism and sustainability. Chapter 3 outlines the methods employed in this study, detailing the frame analysis approach, data collection and analysis processes and limitations. Chapter 4 presents the results of this study, categorizing sustainability frames used by Dutch populist parties. Chapter 5 provides a discussion and conclusion, reflecting on the contributions and the methods of this study in the discussion. Concluding with concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Frame

2.1 Strategic Discourse, Mission Statements and Framing

Strategic management literature states that organisations develop mission statements as a central tool in starting the strategy formulation process, defining an organization's fundamental purpose and values (David & David, 2017; Hill & Jones, 2008). Mission statements should be customer-oriented instead of product-oriented, as the product is only a physical manifestation of an organisation's true mission (David & David, 2017; Hill & Jones, 2008). This same logic can be extended to the political arena, where a party's manifesto functions as its mission. It is a forward-looking, value-loaded document designed to secure stakeholder buy-in not from customers but voters (Klingemann et al., 2006). These manifestos do more than just outline policy, they articulate a particular vision for society. They construct an organizational identity and a version of reality intended to resonate with voters in the case of manifestos (Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

Viewing manifestos as strategic texts is a powerful analytical lens for understanding how political actors attempt to strategically position themselves in complex environments and societal issues like sustainability. This parallels the corporate strategic process where firms engage in symbolic management to shape external perceptions and manage legitimacy within their environments (Suchman, 1995; Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

The strategic function of these manifestos is realized through discourse, which actively shapes institutional realities and stakeholder perceptions. Discursive institutionalism discusses that discourse is not only a way of communicating, but also a way that political actors can influence rules, norms and pressures that can shape organizational behavior by the way they talk about a certain topic (Schmidt, 2008). The strategic use of language illustrates how political discourse shapes the perception of legitimacy and agency within public and policy domains (Shapiro, 1990). Official discourses go beyond solely communicating decisions. The discourses perform strategic functions by framing political actions within acceptable narratives (Shapiro, 1990). These insights support the notion that party manifestos can be seen as discursive instruments that are aimed at shaping public understanding and institutional priorities.

Political discourse has implications for business, as it is a primary force in shaping the non-market environment where firms operate. Baron (1995) established that a firm's success depends on an integrated strategy that navigates both market and non-market forces. Non-market forces including politics, regulation and public sentiment. Political discourse has the ability to shift this landscape. It can pose significant risks and opportunities to which firms must strategically respond to (Lawton et al., 2012). Consequently, understanding how political parties frame issues like sustainability is not merely an academic exercise in political science. Instead, it is a critical component of business strategy and non-market strategy formulation. It enables firms to anticipate pivotal shifts in their operating context, identify potential institutional pressures and develop more effective responses to complex societal challenges. This aligns with the established understanding that firms are increasingly embedded in political processes, necessitating a robust political strategy as part of overall corporate strategy (Hillman et al., 2004).

Within this discursive, non-market context, framing emerges as the central cognitive and communicative mechanism. By selecting and making salient certain aspects of a perceived reality, frames promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). This concept is well-established within strategic management, where scholars have examined how managers' cognitive frames shape their ability to navigate the paradoxical tensions inherent in sustainability and highlighting the influence of interpretive schemas on environmental strategies (Hahn et al., 2014). Furthermore, organizations use framing strategies not only for internal sensemaking but also as a tool to construct legitimacy and manage institutional pressures from their external environment (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). These studies confirm that framing is a core strategic mechanism for interpreting, shaping and positioning within different situations, for both organizations and political actors alike. By drawing on these theoretical foundations, this thesis aims to deconstruct how populist discourse on sustainability specifically contributes to shaping the non-market environment that firms must strategically respond to.

2.2 Framing Theory

When analysing how political parties strategically communicate on a complex issue like sustainability, it is not sufficient to merely describe the content of their manifesto's messages. While sociological insights provide a foundation for understanding frames as essential sense-making devices, this focus does not account for complex construction of these frames in politics (Goffman, 1974). Therefore, construction of a framework capable of deconstructing the message and the parties unlying strategy is necessary.

The political science field offers an applied lens, operationalizing framing as a tool of political contention (Chong & Druckman, 2007). A functional approach for textual analysis from the political science field identified four key functions of a frame: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). This insight is valuable in dissecting 'what' a message is doing. This approach alone is insufficient as it remains focused on the communication aspect of framing and its effects on public opinion (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007). It lacks the ability to analyze the deeper organizational strategies applied by political parties in shaping frames.

To support the analysis of frames, an application of a strategic management perspective on framing is necessary. The strategic management literature goes beyond framing as communication, but sees it as a tool to shape organizational identity and influence the non-market environment (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Baron, 1995). Strategic research on how managers use cognitive frames to make sense of sustainability challenges has been done and resulted in the identification of two types of frames (Hahn et al., 2014). The first frame is the 'Business Case Frame', this frame emphasises economic benefits and compatibility with profit-driven goals of sustainability objectives. The second frame is the 'Paradoxical Frame', this frame acknowledges the inherent tension between economic pressures and sustainability objectives. In addition to these sustainability frames there are also different framing strategies and their ways to connect an organisation's message to the broader public (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014). These strategies include 'legitimacy contestation,' where actors challenge the rightfulness of external norms; 'institutional misalignment,' framing external rules as poorly suited to local values; and 'reputation delegitimization,' undermining the credibility of other actors. Additionally, 'frame bridging' links specific issues to broader cultural themes, while 'frame amplification' intensifies alignment with audience values (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Understanding these framing strategies is crucial for strategic managers to anticipate and interpret the political signals that shape their operating contexts and inform their own strategic responses (Oliver, 1991). Integrating these strategic frames with the frame functions constructs a multi-layered analytical framework that reveals the process of framing as a deliberate and strategic endeavor, with direct implications for a firm's non-market environment.

2.3 Populism

Populism is a ‘thin-centered ideology’ (Mudde, 2004, p.544) that separates society in two groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’ (Mudde, 2004; Kaltwasser et al., 2017). This core of the ideology is inherently flexible and thus is often applied to a wide range of political movements (Abts & Van Kessel, 2015). Consequently, populism is not stuck on one side of the political spectrum, it can range from radical right to the radical left. This while maintaining consistent rhetorical patterns that emphasize elite betrayal, people’s sovereignty and systemic crisis (Hawkins et al., 2018). Understanding this inherent flexibility and core antagonism is critical for a firm's strategy because it explains ‘why’ populist actors adopt particular discursive strategies that directly impact the institutional environment for firms. Specifically, populist discourses can influence the institutional landscape by altering public expectations, shaping regulatory shifts, and impacting the social legitimacy of industries and individual firms (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004).

The ideological thinness of populism makes populist parties more reliant on discursive strategy by simplifying complex issues through emotionally charged language and strategic framing (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). They do so to gain support by pointing out contrasts between ‘ordinary people’ and perceived threats like global institutions or corporate interests (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Climate change and sustainability are especially susceptible to populist reframing, as they can be cast as threats from global institutions or corporate interests (Forchtner, 2020). Right wing populists often cast sustainability as a threat to national sovereignty or economic stability (Huber et al., 2021). While left wing populists critique the commodification of environmental policy and the big influence of multinational organisations in the green transition (Huber et al., 2021). This potentially leads to calls for stricter regulation or nationalization that impact business models.

The ideological struggle between ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’ leads to a coherent set of discursive patterns. The fundamental opposition itself manifests as ‘Anti-Elitism,’ where sustainability is framed as a ‘cosmopolitan elite agenda’ (Mudde, 2004; Lockwood, 2018). By siding with the people, populists adopt a stance of ‘People-Centrism,’ where the ‘common sense’ of ordinary people is presented as superior to the flawed rationality of ‘the elite’ (Mudde, 2004). This definition of ‘the people’ is often drawn along national lines, constructing ‘the people’ as ‘the nation’ (Brubaker, 2017). This leads to ‘Nationalism’ as a defense mechanism against external, elite-dominated forces like the EU, which are said to threaten national sovereignty (Schaller & Carius, 2019). This defense subsequently extends to the economy in the form of ‘Economic Protectionism,’ meant to protect the national economy from what is seen as harmful, elitist policy (Kaltwasser et al., 2017). When this logic is applied to a complex, expert-dominated issue like climate change, it can cause ‘Climate Skepticism.’ Here, the scientific consensus is rejected not just on its merits, but because the experts themselves are framed as part of the out-of-touch ‘elite’ (Forchtner & Kølvrå, 2015; Schaller & Carius, 2019). By integrating these populist frames with the previously discussed strategic frames and framing functions, a multi-layered analytical framework is constructed. This framework is capable of revealing how a populist ideology shapes the process of framing into a deliberate and strategic endeavor, providing crucial insights for firms navigating their dynamic non-market environments.

2.4 Sustainability

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, provides a comprehensive framework for achieving global sustainability (United Nations, 2015). These are the focal points of sustainability worldwide. The main point of the agenda resides in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that addresses a scale of challenges faced by mankind:

1. No Poverty	10. Reduced Inequality
2. Zero Hunger	11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
3. Good Health and Well-being	12. Responsible Consumption and Production
4. Quality Education	13. Climate Action
5. Gender Equality	14. Life Below Water
6. Clean Water and Sanitation	15. Life on Land
7. Affordable and Clean Energy	16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth	17. Partnerships for the Goals
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	

Table 1: Overview of the SDGs defined by United Nations in 2015

These SDGs form a lens to look at sustainability and create a division between different parts of sustainability (United Nations, 2015). This division of sustainability in 17 different SDGs is too fragmented to apply effectively in the framework. For this reason this thesis employs a three dimensional division of the SDGs as proposed by Barta et al. (2023): Environmental Dimension: (SDGs 6, 13, 14, 15), Social Dimension: (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 16), Economical Dimension: (SDGs 8, 9, 10, 12,). SDG 17, partnerships for the goals, is identified as an overarching SDG that can't be limited to a single dimension. By dividing the SDGs in this way it becomes possible to systematically analyze each party's stance on the different dimensions of sustainability using the constructed multi-layered framework.

This theoretical framework constructs a multi-layered analytical lens designed to deconstruct how populist parties strategically frame sustainability. This lens consists of the foundational view of party manifestos as strategic texts that use discourse to shape the non-market environment. To analyze this discourse, the framework first integrates a political science perspective to identify the four key functions of a frame: problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation. It then enriches this analysis with a strategic management layer, which introduces frames like the 'Business Case' and 'Paradoxical' frames, alongside framing strategies such as legitimacy contestation, institutional misalignment, frame bridging, frame amplification and reputation delegitimization. Finally, it overlays this with an ideological lens constructed on populism literature, incorporating key populist discursive patterns like anti-elitism, people-centrism, nationalism, economic protectionism and climate skepticism. By systematically applying this integrated framework to the three dimensions of sustainability, the theoretical lens is capable of revealing not only 'what' populist parties are saying about sustainability, but also 'how' they construct these messages and 'why' they employ specific strategies that influence the non-market environment and thus hold direct strategic relevance for firms.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

3.1.1 Qualitative Frame Analysis

This thesis employs a qualitative frame analysis. This to explore how Dutch populist parties discursively construct sustainability in their 2023 election manifestos and to identify the strategic framing mechanisms present in their political communication. This approach was constructed because it allows for an in-depth examination of how language is used to select particular aspects of reality. This to make them more salient by promoting a certain problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). Frame analysis is suited well for this research as it leads to an in-depth understanding of how complex issues like sustainability are constructed and communicated through strategic political texts like the party manifestos. The application of the method grounded in Entman's (1993) framework aims to improve the trustworthiness of the findings by methodically analyzing the framing mechanisms employed by these populist parties.

3.1.2 Data Sampling

The frame analysis is operationalized through a multi-layered analytical framework, visually represented in Table 2. This framework integrates different key components to guide analysis of manifestos.

The data for this analysis consists of the official 2023 parliamentary election manifestos of the following Dutch political parties:

- Forum voor Democratie (FVD)
- Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)
- Socialistische Partij (SP)
- Juiste Antwoord 21 (JA21)
- BoerBurgerBeweging (BBB)
- Belang van Nederland (BVNL)

These parties were selected based on their prominence in the Dutch political landscape and their identification as populist parties according to the Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey (POPPA) and the PopuList survey (Meijers & Zaslove, 2020; Rooduijn, et al., 2023). The choice on solely selecting these parties and not all of the political parties is based on the fact that this thesis aims to give an in-depth analysis of the populist worldview. By focusing on this selection of parties this thesis assures that the focus on populism isn't pushed to the background when it would also analyse non-populist parties. Abts and Van Kessel (2015) state that populism is not exclusive to one side of the political spectrum and can be identified on both the far left and far right side, for this reason the decision has been made to include different parties that are on opposite sides of the political spectrum. The selection of manifestos ensures a multi-spectrum representation of populism, enabling a comparative analysis of how different ideological strands within populism approach sustainability issues. Manifestos were chosen because they represent the official, publicly stated policy positions of the parties and provide a rich source of discursive material and serve as strategic texts that define the party's objectives and values (David & David, 2017; Hill & Jones, 2008).

3.1.3 Analytical Framework

The frame analysis is operationalized through a multi-layered analytical framework, visually represented in Table 2. This framework integrates different key components to guide the analysis of the manifestos:

Sustainability Dimensions: To provide structure for the analysis of sustainability, this thesis adopts the three-dimensional division proposed by Barta et al. (2023): Environmental Dimension: (SDGs 6, 13, 14, 15), Social Dimension: (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 16), Economical Dimension: (SDGs 8, 9, 10, 12,). SDG 17 is seen as an SDG that goes beyond a single dimension and will be incorporated in each dimension. This division of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) allows for a nuanced comparison of different dimensions of sustainability framed across the manifestos.

Frame Functions: Entman's (1993) four framing functions – problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation – are used in this thesis to identify 'what' frames related to sustainability are doing within the selected excerpts.

Strategic Frames and Framing Strategies: Insights from strategic management literature like business case and paradoxical frames by Hahn et al. (2014) and legitimacy contestation, institutional misalignment, frame bridging, frame amplification and reputational delegitimization by Cornelissen & Werner (2014) are integrated within this framework. These concepts will help in understanding 'why' populist parties might employ certain sustainability frames from a strategic perspective.

Populist Frames: The analysis incorporates five key populist frames as identified in the literature: Anti-Elitism, People-Centrism, Nationalism, Economic Protectionism and Climate Skepticism. These frames help identify common ideological stances and discursive styles of populism as we look at sustainability.

The integration of these analytical layers provides a multi-layered approach:

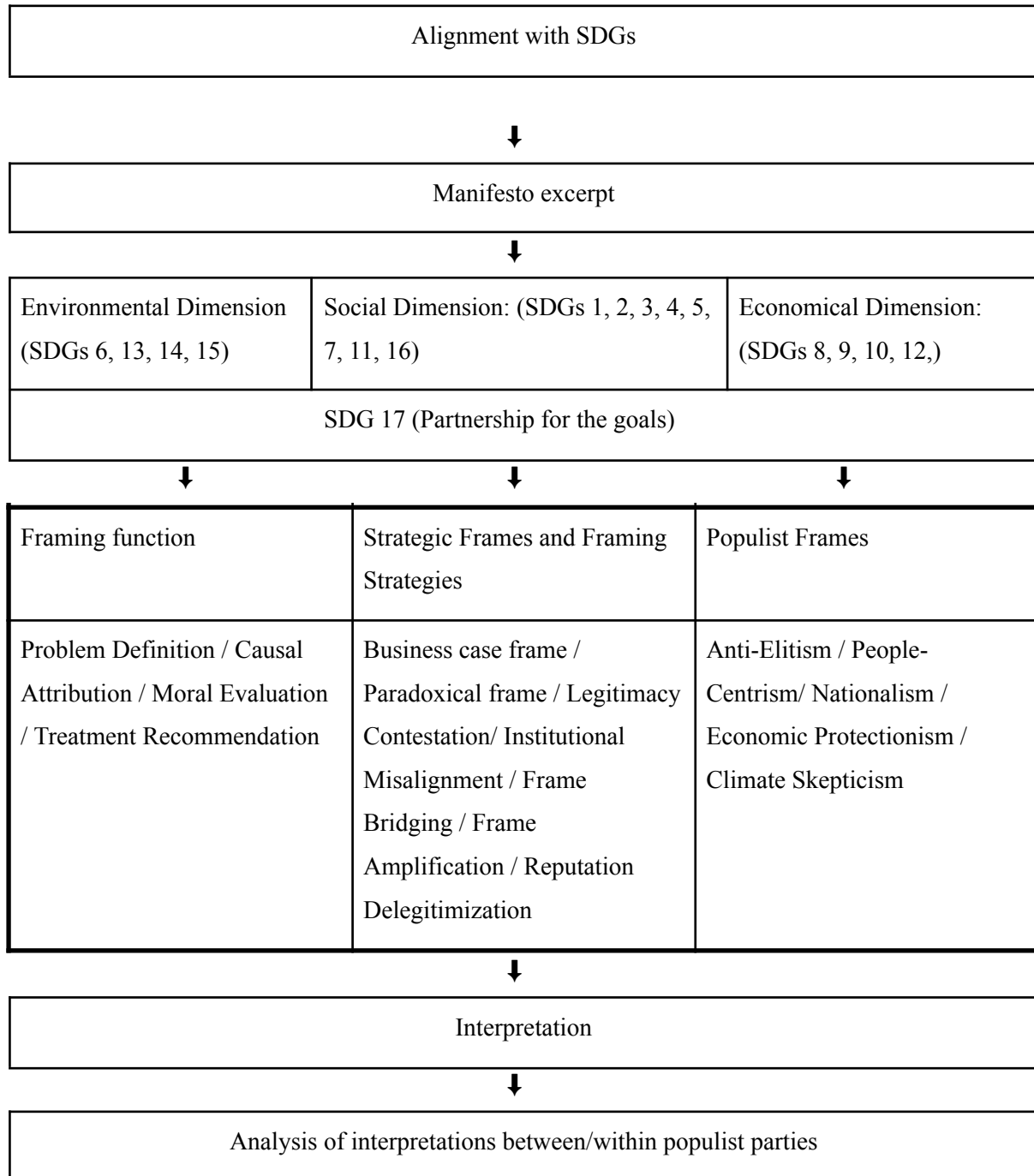


Table 2: Overview of the framework constructed

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and analysis process followed a systematic, iterative, and transparent procedure, designed to move from raw textual data to robust qualitative insights. This process was guided by the multi-layered analytical framework and aimed to ensure the dependability and confirmability of the findings (DeCelles et al., 2021; Zhang & Shaw, 2012).

3.2.1 Data Collection

The 2023 election manifestos for each of the selected parties were accessed through their official party websites or the official website for Dutch elections. The manifestos were downloaded as PDF documents and converted to text files, thus facilitating a more effective layout for coding. This standardization ensured consistency in data format for subsequent qualitative analysis. The total corpus for analysis comprised six manifestos, ranging in length from 36 to 136 pages, providing a substantial body of text for in-depth frame analysis.

3.2.2 Data Analysis Process

The analysis of the manifesto texts followed a systematic and multi-layered procedure, utilizing a rigorous qualitative frame analysis approach to manage the coding process and facilitate systematic data retrieval and pattern identification. The process involved several iterative steps:

Initial Familiarization (Pre-coding Scan): Before detailed coding, each manifesto underwent a thorough pre-coding scan. This involved reading through the entire document to gain a general sense of its structure, dominant themes, overall tone and preliminary ideas about how sustainability might be addressed. This initial immersion helped contextualize subsequent detailed coding.

Sequential Coding and Excerpt Selection: The manifestos were then sequentially coded page by page. The primary criterion for selecting an excerpt (a segment of text) was its direct relevance to one or more of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as defined by the United Nations (2015). A text segment was selected if it discussed a problem, current state, desired state, solutions, policies, values or critiques related to the thematic indicators of any SDG (see Table 1: Operationalization of SDGs in Appendix A). Each selected excerpt was carefully considered within its broader textual context to ensure an accurate understanding of its intended meaning and purpose. This contextual understanding was crucial for the subsequent interpretive steps.

Multi-Layered Coding Application (Deductive and Inductive): For each selected excerpt, the established multi-layered analytical framework was applied systematically. This involved a hybrid coding approach, combining deductive application of pre-defined categories with inductive development of sub-codes (Saldaña, 2021).

- Sustainability Dimension Assignment: The content of the excerpt was first matched to the core theme of one or more SDGs, and subsequently assigned to one of the three consolidated sustainability dimensions (Environmental, Social or Economical) as per Barta et al. (2023). SDG 17 was coded as cross-cutting.
- Frame Functions Coding: The excerpt was then analyzed for the presence of Entman's (1993) four frame functions: Problem Definition, Causal Attribution, Moral Evaluation and Treatment Recommendation (see Table 2: Operationalization of Frame Functions in Appendix A). Deductive codes were applied, and new inductive sub-codes were generated as nuances emerged from the data.
- Strategic Frames and Framing Strategies Coding: Next, the excerpt was coded for strategic management frames (Business Case Frame, Paradoxical Frame) and framing strategies (Legitimacy Contestation, Institutional Misalignment, Reputation Delegitimization, Frame Bridging, Frame Amplification) based on Hahn et al. (2014) and Cornelissen & Werner (2014) (see Table 3: Operationalization of Strategic Frames and Framing Strategies in Appendix A). Again, a combination of deductive application and inductive sub-code generation was used.
- Populist Frames Coding: Finally, the excerpt was analyzed for the presence of the five key populist frames: Anti-Elitism, People-Centrism, Nationalism, Economic Protectionism and Climate Skepticism (Brubaker, 2017; Forchtner & Kølvrå, 2015; Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Lockwood, 2018; Mudde, 2004; Schaller & Carius, 2019) (see Table 4: Operationalization of Populist Frames in Appendix A). Again, a combination of deductive application and inductive sub-code generation was used.
- Iterative Refinement and Memoing: Throughout the coding process, an iterative approach was maintained. This involved constant comparison of new codes with existing ones, refining code definitions and merging or splitting codes as understanding deepened (Saldaña, 2021). Detailed memos were written for each code and emerging theme, capturing the rationale for coding decisions, initial interpretations and connections between different codes and theoretical concepts. These memos served as a crucial tool for reflexivity and for systematically moving from data fragments to higher-level insights (Bansal & Corley, 2012).

Pattern Identification and Thematic Analysis: Following the comprehensive coding of all manifestos, the analysis shifted to identifying patterns and relationships across the coded data. This involved:

- Qualitative Assessment of Prevalence: A systematic review of coded segments allowed for a qualitative assessment of the prevalence of certain codes and sub-codes across parties and sustainability dimensions. This helped identify dominant frames and strategies.
- Cross-Party Comparison: The coded data was systematically compared across the six populist parties to identify similarities and differences in their discursive construction of sustainability and the strategic framing mechanisms employed.
- Within-Party Coherence: Analysis also focused on the internal coherence of framing within each party's manifesto.
- Linking Layers of the Framework: Crucially, the analysis focused on how the different layers of the framework (frame functions, strategic frames, populist frames) interacted to create distinct narratives. For example, how a specific problem definition (function) was linked to an anti-elitist (populist) frame and a legitimacy contestation (strategic) strategy. This systematic linking allowed for the development of the "three distinct narratives" presented in the results.

This systematic approach, supported by rigorous qualitative methods and iterative reflection, ensured that the interpretation of findings was grounded in the textual data, providing a transparent pathway from data collection to the insights presented in the results section.

3.3 Limitations and Biases

This research employs a qualitative frame analysis, a method that is inherently interpretive (Goffman, 1974). In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of analysis. Their background, pre-existing knowledge and perspectives can influence the identification and coding of frames (Bleijenbergh, 2015; Saldaña, 2021). Although the goal is to be as objective as possible, the process of interpreting textual nuances and assigning them to specific analytical categories however is subject to subjectivity. To mitigate this bias and enhance the dependability and confirmability of the study (DeCelles et al., 2021), this study employed a hybrid coding approach within its structured, multi-layered analytical framework. While the main theoretical categories were defined deductively, the specific sub-codes were developed inductively, emerging directly from recurring themes identified

in the data. This inductive component is particularly susceptible to researcher subjectivity, as the identification, naming and grouping of themes into codes is an interpretive act. This iterative process, combined with detailed memoing and consistent code application, aimed to balance theoretical grounding with data-driven insights. This while making the process as systematic and transparent as possible to enhance replicability and trustworthiness (Vennix, 2019; Bansal & Corley, 2012).

A significant ethical consideration in this research is the researcher's own position regarding the political actors and ideologies examined. Political topics require a high degree of self-awareness to prevent personal standpoints from influencing the analysis (Bleijenbergh, 2015). There is an inherent risk that the researcher's own values and preferences could lead to a more critical or more sympathetic reading of certain manifestos, potentially influencing the interpretation of the frames being used. To uphold ethical standards of objectivity and promote reflexivity (Bansal & Corley, 2012), an effort was made to remove personal views on politics and policy throughout the research process. This methodological discipline is essential for maintaining neutrality and ensuring the analysis remains as impartial as possible.

The analysis is exclusively based on the 2023 election manifestos of the selected populist parties. Manifestos are official and rich sources of discursive data, they are also crafted strategically for public persuasion. The manifestos represent the parties' ideal position, not considering their internal deliberations or compromises they might make if they are part of the cabinet (Klingemann et al., 2006). Therefore, this study can only make claims about the publicly framed position of the parties.

The selection of the parties included in this study is based on their classification as populist by established academic surveys (Meijers & Zaslove, 2020; Rooduijn et al., 2023). However, their definition and the operationalisation of 'populism' remains a constant academic debate (Hawkins, 2018). The findings of this study are therefore limited to this sample of parties and cannot be generalized to all forms of populism (Vennix, 2019). This study also is limited by its time and geographical boundness to the 2023 Dutch elections. The results of this study are embedded in the context of this specific year and nation. Consequently, the results are not generalizable to parties in other countries or the same parties in the present time, as political landscape and salient issues might differ significantly (Vennix, 2019).

4. Results

4.1 Overarching Narratives of Sustainability Framing

The analysis of the manifestos revealed that Dutch populist parties, despite their diverse ideological positions, coalesce around three primary narratives when discursively constructing sustainability. These narratives represent distinct strategic approaches to a complex issue, each with unique implications for firms navigating their non-market environment.

Sustainability as a Socio-Economic Justice Problem. The Socialistische Partij (SP) predominantly articulates this narrative.

Sustainability as a Governance and Management Problem. This narrative is primarily adopted by BoerBurgerBeweging (BBB) and Juiste Antwoord 21 (JA21).

Sustainability as an Illegitimate, External Threat to the Nation. This narrative is consistently advanced by the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), Forum voor Democratie (FVD) and Belang van Nederland (BVNL).

These narratives are not mutually exclusive but represent dominant framings that shape each party's strategic communication on sustainability.

4.2 Sustainability as a Socio-Economic Justice Problem (SP)

The Socialistische Partij (SP) predominantly frames sustainability through a lens of socio-economic justice, positioning environmental challenges as symptoms of deeper systemic inequalities. This narrative highlights how the burdens and benefits of sustainability policies are unequally distributed, often at the expense of 'ordinary people' while benefiting corporate interests. Within this narrative, the SP primarily emphasizes the Social and Economic dimensions of sustainability, viewing environmental issues through a lens of social equity and resource distribution.

The SP's core problem definition identifies a "tweedeling in ons land" [division in our country] (SP, 2023, p. 8), where corporate profit is explicitly prioritized over human well-being and environmental health. This is reinforced by a causal attribution that squarely blames "de allerrijksten" [the super-rich] (SP, 2023, p. 7) and market dominance by corporations for societal and environmental ills. The moral evaluation consistently emphasizes Unfairness (ME-Unfairness), judging the current system as fundamentally unjust due to its profit-driven nature. Consequently, the treatment recommendation calls for a radical System Change (TR-SystemChange), advocating for public control over essential services and resources, such as nationalizing energy and decommodifying healthcare.

Strategically, the SP employs Frame Bridging (FB-SocialJustice) to integrate environmental issues directly into its core master frame of social justice, as seen in their call for "Klimaatrechtvaardigheid" [Climate Justice] (SP, 2023, p. 8). This strategy frequently amplifies shared values of fairness and equality. They also engage in Reputation Delegitimization (RD-CorporateActors) by portraying corporations as greedy and untrustworthy, claiming profit is prioritized "boven de belangen van mensen" [above the interests of people] (SP, 2023, p. 7). From a populist perspective, this narrative is deeply rooted in Anti-Elitism (AE-CorporateElite), targeting economic elites and polluting industries. Their People-Centrism (PC-OrdinaryPeopleAffected) defines 'the people' as the working class, tenants and families struggling with poverty, positioning them as victims of a capitalist system. While the SP discusses "soeverein land" [sovereign land] (SP, 2023, p. 30), their Nationalism is distinct. They focus on political and economic self-determination to protect citizens and public services from undemocratic supranational bodies, rather than cultural sovereignty. Their Economic Protectionism is class-based (EP-ProtectingTheVulnerable), aiming to shield domestic producers from unfair international competition, exemplified by their rejection of the Mercosur treaty. The SP exhibits no Climate Skepticism, accepting the scientific consensus but reframing it through a justice lens.

This integrated framing by the SP signals to firms that their operations may face increased scrutiny regarding social equity and profit distribution within the context of sustainability transitions, potentially leading to demands for greater public control or redistribution.

4.3 Sustainability as a Governance and Management Problem (BBB, JA21)

BoerBurgerBeweging (BBB) and Juiste Antwoord 21 (JA21) largely adhere to a narrative that frames sustainability as a governance and management problem. This perspective attributes sustainability challenges to governmental incompetence, a disconnect from citizens' realities and a lack of common-sense policy-making. Within this narrative, these parties often address the Environmental and Economic dimensions of sustainability, linking them to issues of governmental competence and resource management.

Both parties frequently diagnose a problem definition rooted in a System Failure (PD-SystemFailure) of governance and a Loss of Trust (PD-LossOfTrust) between citizens and government. BBB specifically points to a "diepe vertrouwenscrisis tussen burger en overheid" [deep crisis of trust between citizen and government] (BBB, 2023, p. 8) caused by a technocratic "witteboordenoverheid" [white-collar government] (BBB, 2023, p. 7). JA21 similarly highlights "visieloos management" [visionless management] (JA21, 2023, p. 1) and "te reactieve politiek zonder helder toekomstperspectief" [overly reactive politics without a clear future perspective] (JA21, 2023, p. 1). Their causal attribution points to Political Choices (CA-PoliticalChoices) and Bureaucracy (CA-Bureaucracy). The moral evaluation emphasizes a Failure of Responsibility (ME-FailureOfResponsibility) from the government. BBB and JA21 prioritise pragmatism and realism in solutions. Consequently, treatment recommendations focus on procedural reform and practical adaptation, such as BBB's call for a shift from a detailed "regeerakkoord" [coalition agreement] to a broader "regieakkoord" [directorial agreement] (BBB, 2023, p. 3) and JA21's advocacy for "klimaatadaptatie" [climate adaptation] (JA21, 2023, p. 15).

Strategically, both BBB and JA21 prominently utilize the Paradoxical Frame to reconcile environmental and economic interests. JA21 seeks to combine "een florerende natuur met ruimte om te boeren" [a flourishing nature with room to farm] (JA21, 2023, p. 30), while BBB states "Natuur moet samen kunnen gaan met passende andere functies, zoals recreatie en agrarische activiteiten" [Nature must be able to go hand in hand with other suitable functions, such as recreation and agricultural activities] (BBB, 2023, p. 68). This allows them to appeal to diverse constituencies by framing these interests as compatible. They also employ the Business Case Frame (e.g., JA21 presenting nuclear energy as "hét Nederlandse exportproduct" [the Dutch export product] (JA21, 2023, p. 15), and BBB emphasizing agriculture's "sterk strategische waarde" [strong strategic value] (BBB, 2023, p. 67)). Legitimacy Contestation (LC-PolicyOutcomes) is used to challenge the practical efficacy of current policies, such as nitrogen rules (BBB, 2023, p. 68) or climate policies with "onmeetbaar klein effect" [immeasurably small effect] (JA21, 2023, p. 14). Institutional Misalignment is also frequently present, with BBB pointing to inter-ministerial contradictions (BBB, 2023, p. 25). While JA21 viewed court rulings on climate as an overreach into the political domain, creating a

"Derde Kamer" [Third Chamber] (JA21, 2023, p. 40). Populist elements include Anti-Elitism targeting a disconnected technocratic elite (AE-Bureaucracy). People-Centrism (PC-CommonSense, PC-Victimization) defining 'the people' by their common sense and regional identity, often portraying them as victims of urban-centric policies.

While both share this narrative, BBB places a stronger emphasis on the concerns of farmers and rural regions, often using terms like "Noaberschap" [Neighborliness] (BBB, 2023, p. 26). JA21, while also addressing regional divides, tends to emphasize broader governmental pragmatism and realism. For firms, this narrative suggests an environment where policy shifts might favor pragmatic, economically viable sustainability solutions over ideological ones. An environment where regional concerns or perceived bureaucratic inefficiencies could become significant non-market issues.

4.4 Sustainability as an Illegitimate, External Threat to the Nation (PVV, FVD, BVNL)

The PVV, FVD and BVNL consistently frame sustainability as an illegitimate, external threat to the nation. This narrative positions sustainability policies as part of a broader elite-driven agenda that undermines national sovereignty, economic prosperity and cultural identity. It is often linked to immigration or global institutions. Within this narrative, these parties pervasively frame all three dimensions (Environmental, Social, Economic) as being threatened by external forces and elite agendas, with a particular emphasis on challenging environmental policies.

The problem definition in this narrative consistently centers on an existential Threat to Wellbeing (PD-ThreatToWellbeing) of the nation, often rooted in a Flawed Ideology (PD-FlawedIdeology). FVD explicitly states "Er is geen sprake van een klimaatcrisis" [There is no climate crisis] (FVD, 2023, p. 80) and describes "absurde klimaatbeleid" [absurd climate policy] (FVD, 2023, p. 3) making life unaffordable. The PVV frames a "voortdurende asieltsunami en massa-immigratie" [continuous asylum tsunami and mass immigration] (PVV, 2023, p. 6) as severely degrading the Netherlands. The causal attribution is consistently directed towards Elite Interests (CA-EliteInterests) and Political Choices (CA-PoliticalChoices) made by "globalistische organisaties" [globalist organizations] (FVD, 2023, p. 3) or a betraying domestic political establishment. The moral evaluation is characterized by strong language of Betrayal of Trust (ME-BetrayalOfTrust) and Unfairness (ME-Unfairness), often condemning policies as "ongekende schande" [unprecedented disgrace] or "complete waanzin" [complete madness] (PVV, 2023, p. 19). The treatment recommendation is radical: System Change (TR-SystemChange) through abolition of current policies, exemplified by calls to put the Climate Act "direct door de shredder" [straight through the shredder] (PVV, 2023, p. 22) or an "asielstop" [asylum stop] (BVNL, 2023, p. 4).

Strategically, these parties heavily rely on Legitimacy Contestation (LC-ExternalImposition) to challenge international agreements and rules, framing them as illegitimate dictates from "ongekozen eurocommissarissen" [unelected Eurocommissioners] (PVV, 2023, p. 3). Institutional Misalignment is frequently employed to portray supranational organizations like the EU as undermining "onze soevereiniteit en daarmee onze democratie" [our sovereignty and thus our democracy] (FVD, 2023, p. 12). Reputation Delegitimization (RD-System, RD-PoliticalActors) is broad, attacking the entire political system as a "partijkartel" [party cartel] (FVD, 2023, p. 14) or claiming "Onze democratie werkt niet" [Our democracy doesn't work] (PVV, 2023, p. 29). Frame Amplification (FA-Victimization) is a dominant strategy, portraying 'Nederlanders' [Dutch people] as victims of elite betrayal and external forces like immigration. Populist frames are central, with strong Nationalism (N-Sovereignty, N-NationalInterestFirst) as a core identity, advocating for "Nederlanders

weer op 1 zetten" [Put the Dutch people first again] (PVV, 2023, p. 3). Economic Protectionism (EP-NationalInterestFirst) is a guiding principle, calling for an end to financial transfers abroad and protection of the domestic labor market. Finally, Climate Skepticism (CS-DenialOrMinimization) is a defining feature, ranging from FVD's outright denial ("Er is geen sprake van een klimaatcrisis," FVD, 2023, p. 80) to PVV and BVNL's dismissal of climate policy as "onzinnig" [nonsensical] (PVV, 2023, p. 10) or "absurd" (BVNL, 2023, p. 3).

While all three share the core "external threat" framing, FVD stands out with its more explicit Climate Skepticism as outright denial. PVV and BVNL, while also dismissing climate policy, tend to integrate it more directly with concerns about immigration and economic burdens. For firms, this narrative signals a highly volatile non-market environment where existing sustainability regulations and international agreements could be significantly challenged or even dismantled, requiring firms to be prepared for radical policy shifts and potential public backlash against "elite" or "globalist" initiatives.

4.5 Cross-Cutting Themes and Overall Patterns

While the three narratives present distinct approaches to sustainability, a deeper analysis reveals both commonalities in populist style and critical distinctions in their strategic implications for firms.

Across all narratives, a fundamental populist characteristic is the binary opposition between 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite.' Regardless of how 'the people' or 'the elite' are defined, Frame Amplification through Victimization (FA-Victimization) is a consistent strategic tactic used by all parties to mobilize support against a constructed 'other.' This suggests that firms operating in environments influenced by populism should be acutely aware of how their activities might be framed in terms of 'us vs. them' dynamics, and how their legitimacy could be challenged by appeals to a 'victimized' population.

The most significant distinctions lie in *who* are 'the people' and 'the elite,' and consequently, *what* is identified as the core problem and *how* sustainability should be addressed. The SP defines 'the people' by class and 'the elite' as corporate, leading to an economic justice framing of sustainability. BBB and JA21 define 'the people' by common sense and regional identity and 'the elite' as technocratic/bureaucratic, leading to a governance and management framing. PVV, FVD and BVNL define 'the people' by nationality and 'the elite' as globalist/political, leading to a national threat framing. These distinctions are critical for strategic management because they dictate the nature of potential non-market pressures. Firms might face demands for social equity (from the SP), calls for pragmatic policy adjustments (from BBB/JA21) or radical deregulation and challenges to international norms (from PVV/FVD/BVNL). Understanding these divergent framings allows for more nuanced environmental scanning and the development of tailored non-market strategies. Furthermore, these distinctions highlight how different populist narratives prioritize or neglect specific sustainability dimensions (Environmental, Social, Economic), influencing which facets of corporate sustainability efforts might become politically salient or contested.

4.5.1 Qualitative Prominence Matrix: Dominant Frames Across Narratives

To visually represent the qualitative prevalence of key frame types across the three identified narratives, a prominence matrix is provided below. This matrix reflects the qualitative assessment of how salient and frequently each frame type appeared within the manifestos associated with each narrative.

The qualitative prominence ratings (High, Medium, Low, Not Present) in the matrix are derived from a careful, iterative assessment of the coded data, reflecting the salience, consistency, and centrality of each frame type within the respective narratives, as detailed in sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. This is a qualitative judgment based on the depth of analysis, not a numerical count. A rating of High

signifies that the frame is very prominent, consistently observed and central to the narrative. Medium indicates that the frame is present and observable, but less consistently or centrally than those rated 'High'. Low means the frame is present but infrequent or peripheral to the main narrative. Finally, Not Present denotes that the frame was not observed within that specific narrative.

Frame Type / Narrative	Narrative SP	Narrative BBB & JA21	Narrative PVV, FVD & BVNL
Frame Function			
Problem Definition	High	High	High
Causal Attribution	High	High	High
Moral Evaluation	High	Medium	High
Treatment Recommendation	High	High	High
Strategic Frame/Strategy			
Business Case Frame	Not Present	High	Low
Paradoxical Frame	Not Present	High	Not Present
Legitimacy Contestation	High	High	High
Institutional Misalignment	Medium	High	High
Reputation Delegitimization	Medium	Medium	High
Frame Bridging	High	Low	Low
Frame Amplification	High	High	High
Populist Frame			
Anti-Elitism	High	High	High
People-Centrism	High	High	High
Nationalism	Medium	Medium	High
Economic Protectionism	Medium	Medium	High
Climate Skepticism	Not Present	Medium	High

Table 3: Qualitative Prominence Matrix of Frame Types Across Populist Sustainability Narratives

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Contribution to Science

This research significantly contributes to both strategic management and political science literature by systematically applying a multi-layered framing analysis to the manifestos of Dutch populist parties. This study addresses a critical call for a more politically-grounded approach to non-market strategy by businesses (Doh et al., 2012; Lawton et al., 2012), providing a nuanced understanding of how political discourse shapes the non-market environment.

While existing literature has identified framing functions (Entman, 1993) and strategic frames (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Hahn et al., 2014) separately, this study integrates them into a cohesive analytical framework. The results reveal that populist parties do not use these frames in isolation but combine them to create powerful and ideologically consistent narratives. This integrated approach offers a more holistic model for analyzing political discourse as a strategic practice, extending current understanding of how political actors engage in strategic communication to influence institutional realities for firms (Shapiro, 1990; Schmidt, 2008).

The study enriches the literature on populism by providing a multi-spectrum analysis that moves beyond the traditional focus on right-wing, climate-skeptical parties (Forchtner & Kølvrå, 2015; Lockwood, 2018). Including the SP, the analysis reveals that the core populist mechanism of opposing 'the people' to 'the elite' is constant across the political spectrum. However, the definition of these groups and the resulting sustainability frames are highly contingent on the party's host ideology. This finding challenges one-sided views on populist environmental politics and underscores the importance of ideological context for strategic management.

Specifically, the identification of three distinct narratives offers novel theoretical insights for strategic management:

Sustainability as a Socio-Economic Justice Problem (SP): This narrative extends stakeholder theory and corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature by highlighting how populist discourse can amplify demands for social equity and resource redistribution within sustainability debates. It suggests that firms may face increasing non-market pressures to demonstrate not just environmental performance, but also the fairness of their value creation and distribution, potentially challenging conventional business case approaches to sustainability (Hahn et al., 2014). This goes beyond traditional views of CSR as voluntary action, implying potential for mandatory shifts driven by populist political will.

Sustainability as a Governance and Management Problem (BBB, JA21): This narrative contributes to institutional theory and the literature on organizational responses to regulation. It demonstrates how populist actors can contest the legitimacy of existing institutional arrangements (Legitimacy Contestation) and frame regulations as misaligned with local values or practical realities (Institutional Misalignment). For strategic management, this highlights the importance of understanding not just the content of regulations, but the political discourse around their implementation and perceived effectiveness. This suggests a need for firms to engage more deeply with local and regional political actors and emphasize pragmatic, tangible benefits of their sustainability efforts to maintain pragmatic legitimacy (Suchman, 1995).

Sustainability as an Illegitimate, External Threat to the Nation (PVV, FVD, BVNL): This narrative significantly contributes to the literature on political risk management and organizational delegitimization. It reveals how populist actors can employ radical framing strategies (e.g., Reputation Delegitimization, Frame Amplification through Victimization) to portray sustainability initiatives as threats to national sovereignty or economic stability. This challenges firms, particularly those with global supply chains or adherence to international standards, to anticipate and respond to direct attacks on their legitimacy, which may be framed as 'elite-driven' or 'anti-national' (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). This extends understanding of non-market forces beyond traditional regulatory lobbying to include ideologically charged public discourse that can rapidly erode social license to operate.

By integrating these political science insights on populist framing with strategic management theories, this study provides a more granular understanding of how non-market forces are constructed and contested. It moves beyond simply acknowledging institutional pressures to deconstructing their political origins and strategic implications for firms, thereby advancing the theoretical understanding of firms' complex external environments (Mayer & Sparrowe, 2013).

5.1.2 Contribution to Society

The societal value of this study is recognized in the deep frames that are revealed beneath the surface rhetoric. Understanding that a party's opposition to climate policy may be rooted in different populist and strategic frames rather than a disagreement over scientific models. For example, when the PVV frames climate measures as a "dictate" from "unelected eurocommissioners" (PVV, 2023, p. 3), it is not simply a policy critique but a strategic act of Reputation Delegitimization designed to activate a pre-existing mistrust of the EU. Recognizing this allows opponents to shift the conversation from a technical, surface level debate to a more fundamental discussion about national sovereignty and democratic control. In doing so, addressing the core emotional and ideological drivers of the populist position.

For managers and firms engaging with sustainability, this research provides actionable insights to anticipate and mitigate potential shifts in their non-market environment (Geletkanycz & Tepper, 2012):

Firms must move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to sustainability engagement. Understanding the specific populist narratives allows firms to tailor their non-market strategies. For instance, a firm might face demands for greater social equity (SP), calls for pragmatic, locally-focused solutions (BBB/JA21) or radical deregulation and challenges to international norms (PVV/FVD/BVNL).

The pervasive use of Legitimacy Contestation and Reputation Delegitimization by populist parties means firms must proactively manage their social license to operate. This involves transparent communication about their contributions to local economies, fair labor practices and the societal benefits of their sustainability initiatives. This is especially important when operating in regions or sectors susceptible to populist narratives of 'victimization' or 'elite betrayal.'

The findings highlight that sustainability policy, particularly in countries with strong populist movements, is subject to significant volatility. Firms should develop robust political intelligence capabilities to monitor shifts in populist discourse, preparing for potential policy reversals or challenges to international sustainability standards.

Finally, this research promotes broader democratic resilience. The analysis shows that amplifying a sense of Victimization is a universal populist tactic used to mobilize support against a certain 'other'. Recognizing this empowers the public to critically assess political messaging, leading to a more informed electorate that evaluates political debate on substance rather than solely emotional appeal tactics.

5.1.3 Methodological Reflection

The decision to use a qualitative frame analysis was fundamental for achieving the research objective, as it enabled the in-depth deconstruction of the parties' manifestos. The multi-layered analytical framework provided the structure to really dive deeper into the manifestos, instead of remaining on surface-level.

In any qualitative study, the researcher is the primary analytical instrument and with that comes the potential for subjective bias (Goffman, 1974). This risk was managed through a structured and transparent research design. The coding approach induced possibly more subjectivity by incorporating inductively creating subcodes. However, using this approach the analysis was open to nuances in the text while also still being grounded in literature (Saldaña, 2021). The systematic use of detailed memos throughout the iterative coding process enhanced reflexivity and provided a transparent pathway from data fragments to higher-level insights, contributing to the dependability and confirmability of the findings (Bansal & Corley, 2012; DeCelles et al., 2021). Although this does not eliminate subjectivity, it provides valuable nuancing within the deductively defined literature.

The decision to focus exclusively on party manifestos was a choice that shaped the scope and generalization possibilities. Manifestos represent the most formalized and public-facing outing of a party' ideology and strategic positioning (Klingemann et al., 2006). This focus allowed the study to stay clear of the influence of daily political influences and statements. Resulting from this focus is that this study does not capture the dynamic nature of politics and the application or moderation of these frames in pressurized political environments like parliamentary debates or coalition negotiations. The findings are therefore a snapshot of pure strategic and ideological intent, rather than an account of political practice itself.

Finally, the study is deeply embedded in the context of the 2023 Dutch elections. This specificity limits the generalizability of the findings, but it can also be interpreted as a strength. The study is able to focus in a detailed way how populist parties anchor their frames in the national-salient issues surrounding sustainability. The findings are therefore not about populism in general but about its application in the Dutch non-market context, providing a contextually rich case study.

5.2 Conclusion

5.2.1 Concluding Remarks

This thesis set out to answer the question: 'How do populist parties discursively construct sustainability and what strategic framing mechanisms can be identified in their political communication?' The analysis of the 2023 Dutch election manifestos reveals that populist parties construct sustainability not as a standalone issue, but as a symbolic battlefield on which their core ideological struggles are fought. The construction of sustainability is divided into three main types, contingent on the party's position on the political spectrum:

First, represented by the SP, sustainability is framed as a socio-economic justice problem. The core narrative is one of class struggle, where the costs of environmental degradation and climate policy are unfairly borne by ordinary people while corporations profit. The key mechanisms employed are 'Frame Bridging' to link environmental issues to social justice and 'Reputation Delegitimization' targeting corporate actors.

Second, represented by BBB and JA21, sustainability is constructed as a governance and management problem. Their narrative focuses on the perceived incompetence and disconnect of a technocratic, urban elite. They employ 'Paradoxical Frames' to manage the tension between ecology and economy and use 'Institutional Misalignment' to argue that current policies are out of touch with the 'common sense' of the people in the regions. Their critique is less about the 'what' of sustainability and more about the 'how'.

Third, represented by PVV, FVD and BVNL, sustainability is framed as an illegitimate, external threat to the nation. The narrative is one of national sovereignty and cultural identity under siege from globalist elites, the EU and immigration. Their primary mechanisms are 'Legitimacy Contestation' of international agreements, 'Climate Skepticism' to dismiss the problem itself and framing immigration as the primary cause of social and environmental pressures.

In conclusion, the strategic framing of sustainability by Dutch populist parties is a deeply ideological act. Sustainability becomes a vehicle to articulate frustration about economic inequality, governmental failure or national decline. The common thread is the populist style: a binary opposition between a virtuous 'people' (defined by class, geography or nationality) and a corrupt 'elite' (defined as corporate, technocratic or globalist), amplified through a language of crisis, betrayal and victimization. The strategic framing mechanisms identified (e.g., legitimacy contestation, frame bridging, amplification) are deliberately employed to advance these narratives, shaping public understanding and influencing the non-market environment in ways that hold direct strategic relevance for firms.

5.2.2 Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, several suggestions for future research emerge. Firstly, future research could expand the scope of the analysis beyond manifestos to include a wider range of political communication. For example, parliamentary debates, social media posts and public speeches. This would provide a more dynamic insight in how these frames are used in real-time politics. Secondly, by expanding this study to other countries and performing an international comparison between countries that have different salient sustainability issues and political systems, this could reveal a possible influence of national context. Thirdly, while this study focuses on the way frames are created, the reception of these frames by voters is also an interesting avenue for future research. Fourthly, future research could repeat this study in subsequent elections to track the possible evolution of populist framing strategies. Lastly, future research could look into the actual effect of these populist frames in firms, such as investment in green technologies, corporate reputation or non-market performance.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix A: Operationalization Tables

SDG #	SDG Title	Thematic Indicators/Triggers Used for Coding
1	No Poverty	Policies related to poverty reduction, livelihood security and social safety nets (e.g., minimum income, social benefits, cost of living, debt).
2	Zero Hunger	Policies concerning food security, the agricultural sector (farmers, livestock), fisheries and the national food supply chain.
3	Good Health and Well-being	The structure, affordability, and accessibility of the healthcare system (incl. elderly, youth, and mental care) and policies on public health, prevention, and lifestyle.
4	Quality Education	Policies on the education system at all levels, including curriculum content, teacher status, student finance and the value of different educational paths (practical vs. theoretical).
5	Gender Equality	Issues of equal rights, discrimination, social status related to gender and sexual orientation (e.g., LGBTQI+ issues, gender pay gap).
6	Clean Water and Sanitation	Policies concerning water management, water quality, flood protection and sanitation infrastructure.
7	Affordable and Clean Energy	The energy transition, national energy policy, affordability of energy and the promotion or critique of specific energy sources (fossil fuels, renewables, nuclear).
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	Issues related to the labor market, employment conditions, wages, economic prosperity and support for businesses (SMEs, entrepreneurs).
9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	Policies on national infrastructure (transport, digital, energy), industrial strategy, and the promotion of innovation, research and technology.
10	Reduced Inequality	Issues of social and economic inequality, including the urban/rural divide, income gaps, discrimination and equal opportunities.

11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	Policies regarding housing (availability, affordability), spatial planning, urban development, regional livability and local public services.
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	Issues of sustainability in production and consumption, including waste management, recycling, circular economy principles and pollution.
13	Climate Action	The national approach to climate change, including climate policy, CO2 emissions, renewable energy (as a climate tool) and climate adaptation.
14	Life Below Water	Policies concerning fisheries management, the health of marine ecosystems and marine pollution.
15	Life on Land	Policies regarding nature conservation, biodiversity, land use, animal welfare and specific environmental issues like the nitrogen crisis.
16	Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	The functioning of the democratic and legal system, including rule of law, government accountability, citizen participation, national sovereignty, security and human rights.
17	Partnerships for the Goals	Policies concerning international relations and cooperation, including engagement with the EU, UN, NATO and other bodies, as well as development aid and trade agreements.

Appendix A Table 1: Operationalization of SDGs

Frame Function	Triggers/Indicators Used for Coding
Problem Definition	Text defining something as problematic, a threat, a crisis, a negative situation, or a challenge; descriptions of harms, deficiencies or undesirable states. Inductively derived sub-codes will be applied to specify the nature of the diagnosed problem.
Causal Attribution	Text identifying a cause, source, or responsible agent for a problem or situation; explicit or implicit links between actors/factors and outcomes. Inductively derived sub-codes will be applied to specify the nature of the cause.
Moral Evaluation	Text passing judgment, praising, condemning, or assigning moral qualities (good/bad, right/wrong, fair/unfair) to actors, actions, or situations; value-laden language. Inductively derived sub-codes will be applied to specify the nature of the moral judgment.

Treatment Recommendation	Text proposing a solution, course of action, policy, or remedy for a problem; calls to action or descriptions of desired future states/policies. Inductively derived sub-codes will be applied to specify the nature of the recommended treatment.
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Appendix A Table 2: Operationalization of Frame Functions (Entman, 1993).

Strategic Frame and Framing Strategies	Triggers/Indicators Used for Coding
Business Case Frame	Justifying policies by highlighting economic benefits, cost-effectiveness, or competitiveness.
Paradoxical Frame	Acknowledging and attempting to manage inherent tensions between different desirable goals.
Legitimacy Contestation	Challenging the rightfulness, authority, or appropriateness of policies, rules, or outcomes.
Institutional Misalignment	Arguing that existing institutions or policies do not fit the needs or values of "the people" or the nation.
Reputation Delegitimization	Attacking the credibility, competence, or moral standing of opponents, institutions, or alternative policies.
Frame Bridging	Linking specific issues/proposals to broader societal values or concerns (e.g., fairness, freedom).
Frame Amplification	Intensifying certain beliefs, values, or emotions, including highlighting shared values, emphasizing victimization, or offering hope/empowerment.

Appendix A Table 3: Operationalization of Strategic Frames and Framing Strategies (Hahn et al., 2014; Cornelissen et al., 2014).

Populist Frame	Triggers/Indicators Used for Coding
Anti-Elitism	Direct criticism of "the elite," accusations of corruption, incompetence, or betrayal.
People-Centrism	References to "the people," "ordinary citizens," their common sense, suffering, or virtues; claims to speak for the "silent majority."

Economic Protectionism	Calls to protect national industries/jobs, prioritize the domestic economy, critique "unfair" foreign competition.
Nationalism	Emphasis on national sovereignty, identity, cultural preservation; critique of international bodies undermining the nation.
Climate Skepticism	Questioning climate change severity, science validity or policy necessity/efficacy. Framing climate policies as damaging or an elite project.

Appendix A Table 4: Operationalization of Populist Frames (Brubaker, 2017; Forchtner & Kølvråa, 2015; Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Lockwood, 2018; Mudde, 2004; Schaller & Carius, 2019)

7.2 Appendix B: Code lists

Frame Function	Sub-Code	Definition
Problem Definition	PD- Socio-Econ Divide	Framing a problem as a societal division (e.g., between rich/poor, urban/rural, educated/non-educated).
	PD- System Failure	Framing a problem as a failure of a system, institution or policy to function as intended.
	PD- Loss of Trust	Framing a problem as a loss of public trust or confidence in institutions or elites.
	PD- Unjust Burden	Framing a problem as an unfair distribution of costs, risks, or negative consequences onto a specific group.
	PD- Erosion of Public Services	Framing a problem as the decline, deterioration, or disappearance of public services or safety nets.
	PD- Environmental Degradation	Framing a problem as damage to the natural environment, landscape or ecosystems.
	PD- Democratic Deficit	Framing a problem as a lack of democratic control, participation or accountability.

	PD- Threat to Wellbeing	Framing a problem as a direct threat to the safety, security, health, prosperity, or cultural identity of individuals or the nation.
	PD- Market Failure In Public Domain	Framing a problem as the negative consequence of applying market principles to public sector domains.
	PD- Flawed Ideology	Framing a problem as being rooted in a wrong or dangerous ideology or way of thinking.
	PD- Bureaucracy	Framing a problem as being caused by excessive rules, administrative complexity or red tape.
Causal Attribution	CA- Political Choices	Attributing a problem to the deliberate choices and decisions of political actors or governments.
	CA- Elite Interests	Attributing a problem to the self-interest of political, corporate or bureaucratic elites.
	CA- Market Dominance	Attributing a problem to the negative effects of market forces, competition or corporate power.
	CA- Lack of Accountability	Attributing a problem to a lack of oversight, accountability or consequences for those in power.
	CA- Flawed Ideology	Attributing a problem to the prevalence of a specific, flawed ideology or worldview.
Moral Evaluation	ME- Unfairness	Evaluating a situation as being unjust, inequitable or unfair.
	ME- Failure of Responsibility	Evaluating the actions (or inaction) of an actor as a failure of their duty or responsibility.
	ME- Common Good vs Elite Gain	Evaluating a situation by contrasting the common good with the narrow interests or gains of an elite group.

	ME- Human Dignity	Evaluating a situation based on its respect for or violation of human dignity, worth, and fundamental rights.
	ME- Betrayal of Trust	Evaluating an action as a betrayal of promises made or trust placed in an actor.
	ME- Solidarity	Evaluating a situation based on the principle of solidarity and mutual support.
	ME- Trust	Evaluating a situation based on the importance of trust.
Treatment Recommendation	TR- System Change	Recommending a fundamental change or overhaul of a system, policy or institution.
	TR- Redistribution	Recommending the reallocation of resources, wealth or burdens.
	TR- Strengthen Democracy	Recommending measures to increase democratic participation, transparency and accountability.
	TR- Hold Accountable	Recommending measures to hold specific actors accountable for their actions.
	TR- Invest in Public Services	Recommending increased investment in public services, infrastructure or social programs.
	TR- Empower Citizens Workers	Recommending measures to give more power, choice or autonomy to citizens, workers or local communities.
	TR- Regulation	Recommending the introduction, removal, or change of specific rules and regulations.
	TR- Return to Public Control	Recommending that a service or sector be brought back under public ownership or control.
	TR- Strengthen Social Safety Net	Recommending the reinforcement or expansion of social safety nets.

TR- Cultural Preservation	Recommending measures to protect or restore cultural traditions, norms, or identity.
TR- National Interest First	Recommending that national interests should be the primary guide for policy.

Appendix B Table 1: Sub-codes Frame Functions

Strategic Frame and Framing Strategies	Sub-Code	Definition
Business Case Frame		Framing a policy (often related to sustainability or economy) by highlighting its economic benefits, cost-effectiveness or contribution to competitiveness.
Paradoxical Frame		Acknowledging and attempting to reconcile or manage inherent tensions or contradictions between different desirable goals (e.g., economic growth vs. environmental protection).
Legitimacy Contestation	LC- Policy Outcomes	Challenging the legitimacy or desirability of the outcomes of a specific policy.
	LC- External Imposition	Challenging the legitimacy of a policy or rule by framing it as being imposed by an outside entity (e.g., the EU).
Institutional Misalignment	IM- People's Needs	Arguing that existing institutions or policies are misaligned with the real needs of the people.
	IM- Public Good	Arguing that existing institutions or policies are misaligned with the common or public good.
Reputation Delegitimization	RD- Political Actors	Attacking the credibility, competence or morality of political opponents.

	RD- System	Attacking the credibility or legitimacy of an entire system, institution or policy framework.
	RD-Corporate Actors	Attacking the credibility or morality of corporations or other non-state actors.
Frame Bridging	FB- Social Justice	Linking a policy or argument to broader ideals of fairness, equity and social justice.
	FB- Democratic Values	Linking a policy or argument to core democratic principles like freedom, transparency and accountability.
	FB- Solidarity	Linking a policy or argument to the value of solidarity and mutual support.
Frame Amplification	FA- Shared Values	Emphasizing values presumed to be held by the target audience to increase resonance.
	FA- Victimization	Highlighting the suffering or injustice experienced by a group to evoke emotion and mobilize support.
	FA- Hope Empowerment	Offering a sense of agency, optimism, or a positive vision for the future to inspire action.

Appendix B Table 2: Sub-codes Strategic Frames and Framing Strategies

Populist Frames	Sub-Code	Definition
Anti-Elitism	AE- Political Elite	Targeting politicians, government or established political parties.
	AE- Corporate Elite	Targeting large corporations, multinationals, banks or CEOs.
	AE- Bureaucracy	Targeting civil servants, bureaucratic processes or supra-national bodies (e.g., EU, UN).

	AE- Media Elite	Targeting mainstream media outlets and journalists.
People-Centrism	PC- Ordinary People Affected	Highlighting the impact of issues on "ordinary" people, citizens or specific groups (e.g., the elderly, workers).
	PC- Voicing Peoples Concerns	Claiming to speak for the people or articulate their worries.
	PC- Empowering People	Advocating for giving more power, choice or control to the people.
	PC- Common Sense	Framing a position as simple, pragmatic and based on common sense, as opposed to complex or ideological elite thinking.
	PC- Collective Action	Emphasizing the power of people coming together to effect change.
	PC- Protecting The Vulnerable	Positioning the party as a protector of vulnerable groups within "the people."
	PC- Victimization	Portraying "the people" or specific segments as victims of elites, policies or external threats.
	PC- Human Dignity	Invoking the dignity of the common person.
	PC- Shared Values	Appealing to values presumed to be widely held by "the people."
Economic Protectionism	EP- Protecting The Vulnerable	Framing economic policies as necessary to protect vulnerable domestic groups or sectors.
	EP- National Interest First	Prioritizing the national economy, jobs, and businesses over international concerns or competition.
Nationalism	N-Sovereignty	Emphasizing the importance of national sovereignty and resisting external influence (e.g., from the EU, UN).
	N-Cultural Preservation	Advocating for the protection of national culture, traditions, identity, and values.

	N-National Interest First	Explicitly stating that the interests of the nation should be the primary driver of policy.
Climate Skepticism	CS-Denial or Minimization	Denying or downplaying the existence, severity, or human causes of climate change or related environmental issues (e.g., nitrogen) or the effectiveness of proposed solutions.

Appendix B Table 3: Sub-codes Populist Frames