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The Value of Patriotism in the FCC's Election Campaign Rhetoric (2018): A Sociopolitical Analysis of the Vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how patriotism was used as a legitimation strategy in the programmatic discourse of the Common Front for Congo (FCC) during the December 30, 2018, presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Based on a lexicometric analysis of a 12,420-word corpus, nine patriotic keywords (people, sovereignty, homeland, nation, history, culture, identity, tradition, citizenship) appear a total of 463 times, representing 3.73% of the corpus. The vocabulary is heavily concentrated around two central themes, "people" (147) and "sovereignty" (96), which account for 52.5% of occurrences, while "citizenship" (12) remains marginal. The article argues that patriotism functions less as a doctrine than as a resource for legitimizing the speaker and delegitimizing the opponent, at the risk of semantic erosion.

Keywords: patriotism; legitimation; political vocabulary; lexicometry; FCC; elections.

1. INTRODUCTION

In young democracies as well as in regimes undergoing transformation, electoral competition is not decided solely by platforms, alliances, or material resources. It is also decided by words. Stating who one is, to whom one speaks, and on what grounds one seeks votes is a linguistic endeavor that political science has long regarded as secondary, even though it is fundamental to the construction of authority. Among the most enduring verbal resources available to those vying for power is patriotism: invoking attachment to the homeland, the people, sovereignty, or a shared history makes it possible to transform a candidacy into a mission and a party into the guardian of the public interest.

The presidential, legislative, and provincial elections held on December 30, 2018, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) provide a particularly fertile ground for studying this phenomenon. These elections took place at the end of a long crisis of legitimacy triggered by the conclusion of Joseph Kabila's second constitutional term in 2016, by successive postponements of the vote, and by the so-called New Year's Eve political agreement, brokered by the Catholic Church. The Carter Center (2019) emphasizes in its assessment report that these elections marked the first presidential transition through the ballot box in the country's history, against a backdrop of significant legal, technical, and political tensions. In this landscape, the Common Front for the Congo (FCC) a platform uniting the presidential camp around Joseph Kabila nominated Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary as its candidate and had to defend its record while justifying the continued rule of a political family that had been in power since 2001.

It is worth asking how the FCC's campaign platform aligns with patriotism and how this concept is transformed into a strategy for legitimizing power. This question breaks down into three subsidiary inquiries. Which lexical forms from the field of patriotism dominate the discourse, and in what hierarchy? What political functions do these forms fulfill, particularly in terms of validating the speaker and discrediting the opponent? Finally, what limitations and contradictions do the intensive use of this vocabulary reveal?

The hypothesis put forward is that the FCC's patriotism is based on an unbalanced lexical economy: a core set of terms with strong symbolic weight (people, " " sovereignty) carries the bulk of the legitimization, while terms that imply institutional or civic content (citizenship) are neglected. This imbalance is not accidental; it reflects a top-down conception of the relationship between rulers and the ruled, in which loyalty to the homeland serves as justification.

The significance of this research is scientific, political, legal, and institutional. It is scientific because it contributes to the study of Congolese political language based on a defined corpus and an explicit method. It is political because understanding legitimation strategies sheds light on how those in power seek to secure support when their legitimacy is challenged. Finally, it is of legal and institutional interest because the imbalance between the vocabulary of belonging and that of citizenship raises the question of the place that political discourse accords to the rights and duties of the governed a question of direct interest to constitutional scholars.

The study employs a sequential mixed-methods approach, combining lexicometry (counting and correlating nine forms within a corpus of 12,420 words) with qualitative discourse analysis. It follows in the tradition of textual statistics research (Lebart and Salem, 1994) and applies textometry to keywords in political discourse.

This article will present some definitional terminological clarifications regarding patriotism, legitimation, and political power in the Congolese context. It will then address epistemology within a quantified, sequential analysis of the lexical equivalents of patriotism.

The discussion and interpretation of data on the FCC's sociopolitical vocabulary will conclude this study,

2. PATRIOTISM AND ITS CONTEXUAL EQUIVALENTS

2.1 Patriotism

Patriotism is a more unstable concept than it appears. In the republican tradition which Viroli (1995) helped to rehabilitate it refers to a love of institutions and shared freedom, as opposed to a nationalism based on cultural or ethnic identity. In everyday political usage, the line is much more blurred: patriotism readily shifts toward the celebration of the nation, its history, and its uniqueness. Billig (1995) has shown that this attachment is not limited to moments of exaltation; it is reproduced on a daily basis through a "banal" nationalism, consisting of catchphrases, flags, and deictics ("we," "our country") that constantly remind the community of its existence. Anderson (1996), for his part, emphasizes that the nation is an imagined community, whose cohesion stems from shared narratives and representations rather than from actual mutual acquaintances.

This perspective has a direct methodological implication: if the nation is constructed through language, its vocabulary serves as a relevant indicator of how a political actor

constructs it. The nine terms selected for this study ("people," "sovereignty," "homeland," "nation," "history," "culture," "identity," "tradition," and "citizenship") form what might be called a patriotic lexical field. They are not equivalent. "People" and "nation" refer to the definition of the political community; "sovereignty" to control over one's destiny; "homeland" to the emotional dimension of attachment; "history," "culture," "identity," and "tradition" to the depth of memory that underpins continuity; and "citizenship" to the legal and civic relationship between the individual and the state. This last concept occupies a special place, as it implies rights, duties, and institutions, that is, a substance that can be evaluated.

2.2 The Legitimation of Power

Legitimation refers to the process by which a power gains the support of those over whom it is exercised. Weber (1971) distinguishes three ideal types of legitimate domination traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational and points out that all power seeks to inspire belief in its legitimacy. This belief is constructed in part through words. Bourdieu (2001) has shown that symbolic power rests on the ability to name, classify, and establish definitions of the social world as self-evident. Charaudeau (2005), from a discourse analysis perspective, describes political discourse as a "mask" game in which the speaker simultaneously constructs an image of self (credibility, identification) and an image of the citizen to whom he or she is speaking.

It should be added that legitimacy is never secured once and for all. It is constantly negotiated between the authority that claims it and the publics that grant or withdraw it, which explains why political discourse devotes so much attention to staging the relationship between the speaker and their audience. Applied to our subject, this approach invites us to consider patriotism not as doctrinal content but as a mechanism of legitimation. Invoking the homeland allows one to present oneself as the champion of an interest superior to partisan interests; invoking the people allows one to claim a mandate; invoking sovereignty allows one to frame political competition as a clash between those who defend the country and those who threaten it. Contemporary scholarships in Africa confirm the widespread nature of these strategies. Sounsoumouna Ketem (2023), analyzes the crisis of legitimacy in African political power as a growing divide between rulers and the ruled, fueled by dependence on external models and a neglect of cultural specificities. Carchereux (2024), discussing the resurgence of coups d'état, shows that regimes emerging from such upheavals seek to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the population by invoking a narrative of breaking with colonial models of power. Finally, Sithole (2025) highlights that, in several contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, political legitimacy is frequently linked to military or revolutionary experience and is expressed through a repertoire of the "patriot" and the "activist."

2.3 Political Vocabulary as a Subject of Analysis

Studying political vocabulary involves treating the frequency, distribution, and contexts of word usage as significant social phenomena. Lexicometry, which has evolved into textometry with the computerization of methods, offers proven tools for this purpose: counting word forms, calculating relative frequencies, identifying specific features, and examining concordances and co-occurrences (Lebart and Salem, 1994). Its value for political discourse lies in its ability to objectively identify trends that are not always apparent through reading alone, while directing the analyst to consider contexts in order to interpret what the numbers indicate.

The concept of "formula" proposed by Krieg-Planque (2009) is particularly valuable here. A formula is a set of formulations that, at a given moment and in each public sphere, crystallizes, circulates, and becomes a social referent and a point of controversy. Several terms in our field sovereignty foremost among them exhibit these properties: they are adopted by numerous actors, laden with competing meanings, and susceptible to being turned against those who claim them. Miao (2023) demonstrates, regarding the lexicon of culture in Chinese political discourse, that textometric analysis of a keyword makes it possible to track its uses, shifts in meaning, and lexical associations across a programmatic corpus. Our approach follows this line of research, with a more limited corpus but a more focused object of study.

Finally, it is important to distinguish between two levels of analysis. The distributional level concerns a form's place within the entire corpus: its frequency, density, and rank. The contextual level concerns its surroundings: the words with which it appears (co-occurrences), the segments in which it is embedded (concordances), and the syntactic constructions it governs. The first level answers the question "how many?", while the second answers the question "how?". This article focuses on the first level to establish an over al structure and employs the second in an interpretive manner, while explicitly acknowledging its limitations.

2.4 The Congolese Context: From Mobutu-Era Authenticity to the 2018 Election

Patriotism as a technique of governance has a long history in the DRC. Under Mobutu, the Popular Movement of the Revolution (MPR), founded in 1967 with the N'Sele Manifesto, established nationalism as state doctrine and, beginning in 1971, "authenticity" as official cultural policy, coinciding with the country's renaming as Zaire. Young and Turner (1985) analyzed how the Zairian state linked this ideology to an increasingly personalized form of power; Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) and Ndaywel è Nziem (1998) highlight its historical roots and contradictions. Mbembe (2000), for his part, proposed an interpretation of the "postcolony" in which the symbols of power and their staging are an integral part of domination.

In 2018, the discursive landscape is diverse. The Cach (Cap pour le changement) and the UDPS promote a discourse of political change, rupture, and the defense of the people, in line with the UDPS's historic motto, "The People First." Discourses originating in the eastern part of the country, for their part, are shaped by persistent insecurity and the issue of territorial integrity a challenge that Stearns (2022) analyzes in his study of the unspoken conflict. The FCC, for its part, must speak from the position of the incumbent: it must defend continuity without appearing stagnant and claim to represent the people without appearing to be in opposition to them. It is in this uncomfortable position that patriotism becomes a central resource.

The election on December 30, 2018, ultimately saw the proclaimed victory of Félix Tshisekedi, with the FCC candidate finishing in third place, before the Constitutional Court validated the results in January 2019. Subsequent analyses have described a conflictual coexistence between the FCC, which holds a majority in Parliament, and the new presidency. Our aim is not to revisit the electoral dispute, but to examine the discourse the FCC employed in the run-up to the election to legitimize its candidacy.

2.5 Research Hypotheses

Three hypotheses structure the analysis. The first (H1) posits lexical concentration: the FCC's patriotic discourse is dominated by a small number of terms, foremost among which are "people" and "sovereignty," which account for more than half of the occurrences. The second (H2) posits an imbalance between registers: terms related to symbolic and politico-territorial belonging would largely outweigh those related to citizenship. The third (H3) posits a legitimizing function: patriotic vocabulary would serve to characterize the speaker and discredit the opponent rather than to present programmatic content.

These hypotheses are not of the same nature. H1 and H2 are directly testable through frequency counting; H3 is interpretive and can only be partially supported by frequency data. This difference in status is acknowledged: it corresponds to the sequential logic of the approach, which proceeds from the establishment of lexical facts to their interpretation.

3. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Mixed Sequential Approach and Operationalization of Forms of Patriotism

The words of political discourse are not neutral reflections of preexisting realities; they are acts that contribute to the construction of these realities. The method adopted is a mixed sequential approach. The first phase is quantitative and lexicometric: it involves counting the forms within the patriotic domain, calculating their absolute and relative frequencies, and comparing their respective importance. The second phase is qualitative: the numerical results are interpreted through the lens of discourse analysis, considering the pragmatic functions of words (to endorse, to discredit, to promise, to mobilize) and the political context.

This approach addresses a twofold need. On the one hand, counting alone is insufficient: the same expression can be used to extol, to accuse, or to reassure, and frequently says nothing about these uses. On the other hand, qualitative analysis alone risks being overly subjective: without quantitative benchmarks, the impression of "a great deal of patriotism" may stem from a few striking passages rather than from an overall pattern. The approach adopted from numbers to context allows for a combination of both.

Nine terms were selected based on their association with the patriotic domain. These are: people, sovereignty, homeland, nation, history, culture, identity, tradition, and citizenship. The count focuses on the occurrences of each term in the corpus that is, the number of times it appears regardless of the number of distinct passages in which it occurs. Relative frequencies are calculated relative to the size of the corpus (12,420 words) and expressed as percentages and per mille. Density is expressed as an average interval: one occurrence every n words.

The nine forms were then grouped into three registers based on their function in the construction of patriotic discourse: a political-territorial register (people, sovereignty, homeland, nation), a register of memory and identity (history, culture, identity, tradition), and a civic re (citizenship). This grouping

serves as an interpretive tool, not as data from the corpus.

3.2 Counting Protocol and Data Reliability

The counting process follows a few simple principles designed to ensure that the results are reproducible. Each form is identified in the full text, regardless of its position within the discourse (title, body of the text, form of address). Inflectional variants of the same form—particularly the singular and plural—are treated as belonging to the same entry, so as not to artificially fragment a term's frequency. Uses that do not fall within the political domain (for example, purely technical or descriptive uses of the word) are flagged for review during the qualitative analysis phase. Finally, the results are presented in both absolute and relative terms, to allow for comparison with other corpora of varying sizes.

The internal consistency of the data was verified by a sum calculation: the absolute frequencies of the nine forms (147, 96, 62, 58, 31, 24, 18, 15, and 12) total 463 occurrences, and the cumulative relative shares amount to 100% of the corpus. This verification is useful because it prevents transcription discrepancies between the raw count and the summary tables.

3.3 The Patriotic Field in FCC Discourse

In a corpus of 12,420 words, the nine selected forms total 463 occurrences, representing 3.73% of the text's words—or, on average, one occurrence of the patriotic domain every 26.8 words. This density is high: in the context of a policy speech, it means that a reader or listener encounters a patriotic form roughly every two or three sentences. Table 1 presents the detailed distribution.

Table 1: Occurrences of the nine forms of the patriotic field in the corpus (12,420 words)

Rank	Form	Occurrences	Share of the field (%)	Frequency (of the corpus)	Density (1 occurrence every n word)
1	people	147	31.7	11.84	84.5
2	sovereignty	96	20.7	7.73	129.4
3	homeland	62	13.4	4.99	200.3
4	nation	58	12.5	4.67	214.1
5	History	31	6.7	2.50	400.6
6	Culture	24	5.2	1.93	517.5
7	identity	18	3.9	1.45	690.0
8	tradition	15	3.2	1.21	828.0
9	citizenship	12	2.6	0.97	1,035.0
	Total	**463**	**100.0**	**37.28**	**26.8**

Source: Lexical analysis of the FCC's campaign platform corpus (2018).

The hierarchy is clearly defined. "People" ranks first with 147 occurrences, representing 31.7% of the field and 1.18% of the entire corpus; "sovereignty" follows with 96 occurrences (20.7%). Together, these two terms account for 243 occurrences, or 52.5% of the total. Adding "homeland" (62) and "nation" (58) brings the total to 363 occurrences, or 78.4% of the field. The five other terms account for the remaining 21.6%. Figure 1 illustrates this distribution.

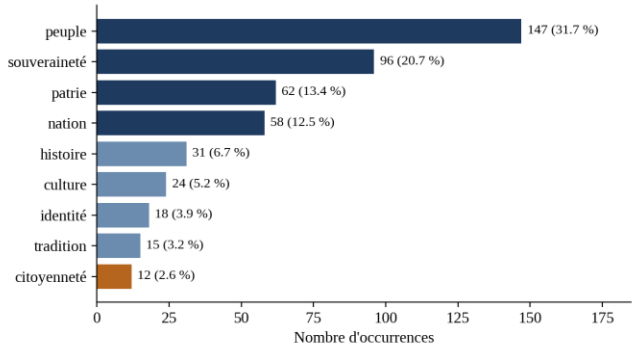


Figure 1: Occurrences of the nine forms in the patriotic field (n = 463)

Figure 2 presents the same distribution in the form of a Pareto chart: the cumulative curve shows that the first four forms account for nearly four-fifths of the occurrences. The patriotic vocabulary of the FCC is therefore concentrated rather than dispersed.

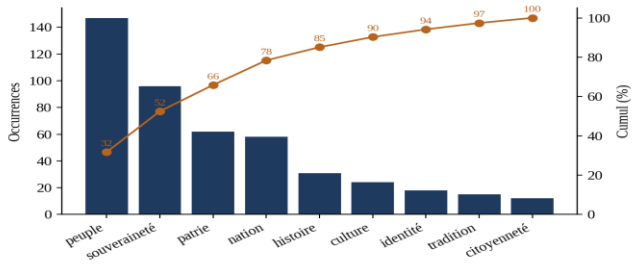


Figure 2: Distribution and cumulative frequency of occurrences (Pareto chart)

3.4 A Three-Register Structure

Grouping the forms into three registers reveals a massive imbalance. The political territorial register (*people*, *sovereignty*, *homeland*, *nation*) accounts for 363 occurrences (78.4%). The register of memory and identity (*history*, *culture*, *identity*, *tradition*) accounts for 88 (19.0%). The civic register, limited to *citizenship*, accounts for only 12 (2.6%). In other words, for every occurrence of *"citizenship*," the discourse contains more than thirty from the political-territorial register.

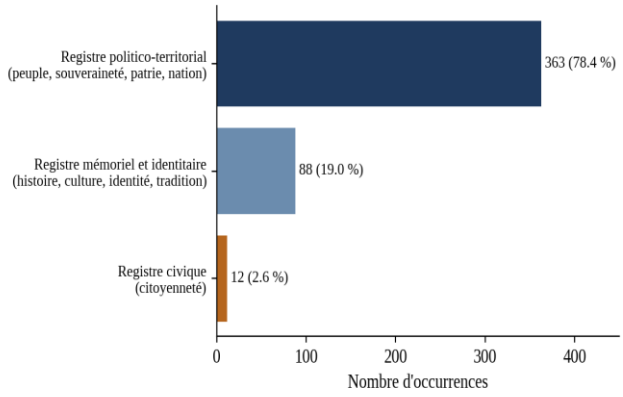


Figure 3: Distribution of occurrences according to the three registers of the patriotic domain

3.5 Three Main Findings

The first finding is the primacy of "people." With 147 occurrences or one for every 84 to 85 words this term is used more than one and a half times as often as the second most frequent term ("sovereignty," 96) and twelve times as often as "citizenship" (12). The second finding is the prominence of "sovereignty": 96 occurrences, or 0.77% of the corpus, making it the second most frequent term in the field and one of the organizing concepts of the discourse. The third finding is the relative weakness of terms related to the depth of collective memory. History (31), culture (24), identity (18), and tradition (15) remain at modest levels, even though they are often presented as the foundation of patriotism. Finally, citizenship is the least frequent form in the field: 12 occurrences, or less than one occurrence per 1,000 words (0.97‰).

3.6 Analysis by Term

"People" (147 occurrences; 1.18% of the corpus) is the pivotal form of the discourse. Its frequency suggests that it functions simultaneously as the addressee ("the people" to whom one speaks), as the claimed source of legitimacy, and as the subject of competition, since all actors claim to represent it. An average of one occurrence every 84 to 85 words makes it the semantic backbone of the entire text.

Sovereignty (96; 0.77%) ranks second. As a term denoting control over the collective destiny, it lends itself to a dual interpretation: internal (power belongs to the people) and external (the country must not depend on anyone). Its prominence suggests that the discourse seeks to frame the electoral competition within a context of defending national autonomy.

"Homeland" (62; 0.50%) and "nation" (58; 0.47%) occur with similar frequencies, indicating that they are used in similar contexts. "Homeland" refers to the emotional dimension of attachment, while "nation" refers to the established political community. Their near equivalence in frequency suggests alternating usage rather than a contrast in meaning. Together, they form along with "people" and "sovereignty" the core of 363 occurrences in the political-territorial register.

"History" (31; 0.25%) is the most frequent term in the memory register. Its moderate presence indicates that the discourse draws on the past as a source of legitimacy, but without making it a dominant theme. "Culture" (24; 0.19%) and "identity" (18; 0.14%) confirm this trend: the FCC's patriotism is not primarily constructed as a patriotism rooted in cultural heritage. "Tradition" (15; 0.12%) is even rarer, which contrasts with the weight it carried in the discourse of authenticity under the MPR.

Citizenship (12; 0.10%) brings up the rear. This low frequency is more notable given that the term refers to the legal dimension of belonging to the one governed by constitutional law. The contrast with "people," which appears thirteen times more frequently (147 versus 12, a ratio of 12.25), is one of the most telling findings of the study and will be revisited in the discussion.

3.7 Summary of Results

Table 2 summarizes the distribution by register. It confirms that the patriotic domain of the FCC is structured around a political-territorial core that alone accounts for nearly 30 words per 1,000 in the corpus, compared to about 7 per 1,000 for the commemorative register and less than 1 per 1,000 for the civic register.

Table 2: Distribution of occurrences across the three registers

Register (forms)	Occurrences	Share of the field (%)	Frequency (of the corpus)	Relation to the civic register
Political-territorial (people, sovereignty, homeland, nation)	363	78.4	29.23	30.3
Memory and Identity (history, culture, identity, tradition)	88	19.0	7.09	7.3
Civics (citizenship)	12	2.6	0.97	1.0
Total	**463**	**100.0**	**37.28**	—

Source: Lexical analysis of the FCC's campaign platform corpus (2018).

Two key findings emerge. On the one hand, the overall density of patriotic vocabulary (37.3 words per 1,000) is high, indicating that the discourse is strongly influenced by this register. On the other hand, this density is distributed very unevenly: more than three-quarters of the occurrences come from just four forms. These two findings validate, on a descriptive level, hypotheses H1 and H2 formulated in 1.6. Validating H3, however, requires an analysis of the context, which is the subject of the discussion.

4. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. Patriotism as a Means of Legitimizing Power

The primacy of the people and sovereignty can be interpreted as a sign of legitimation through delegation and protection. To invoke the people is to position oneself as their representative; to invoke sovereignty is to position oneself as their protector. The combination of the two paints a familiar picture: that of a power that derives its legitimacy from its ability to defend the people against external threats. This configuration is consistent with the context of 2018, when the presidential camp faced international pressure and challenges regarding the validity of its management of the transition.

Here we see the mechanism described by Weber (1971): a power that can no longer rely fully on legal-rationality because it is being challenged tends to mobilize charismatic and traditional sources of support, Patriotism fulfills this substitute function. It shifts the debate from the realm of law (compliance with constitutional deadlines, the electoral calendar) to that of belonging (who truly defends the country). Sounsoumouna Ketem (2023) notes, in his analysis of the crisis of legitimacy in Africa, that the consent of the governed is undermined when the gap between rulers and the ruled widens; discursive patriotism is a way to symbolically bridge this gap.

The lexical concentration observed in the corpus reinforces this interpretation. A discourse based on a detailed reform agenda would tend to distribute its vocabulary across sector-specific domains. Concentration on a few highly symbolic terms, on the other hand, suggests a discourse that prioritizes identification (who we are) over demonstration (what we will do). Charaudeau (2005) calls this a strategy of credibility and identification, as opposed to a strategy of programmatic rationality.

One final element deserves attention: the temporal dimension of legitimation. The FCC speaks from a position of continuity, since its political party has been in power since 2001. Patriotism allows it to transform this duration, which could be perceived as a sign of wear and tear into proof of reliability. To call oneself a patriot is to suggest consistency in defending the country. It should be noted, however, that the limited presence of forms of memory (history, tradition) in the corpus indicates that this continuity is not supported by a developed historical narrative: it is asserted rather than demonstrated.

4.2. Qualifying the Speaker and Disqualifying the Opponent

Patriotism serves a dual function: to qualify and to disqualify. By calling oneself a patriot, the speaker qualifies themselves, that is, they attribute a virtue to themselves. But this qualification derives its strength only through contrast: being a patriot implies that others are less so. The vocabulary of sovereignty lends itself particularly well to this logic, because it presupposes an "outside" from which one must guard against. The explicit or implicit designation of opponents as agents of foreign interests is a classic tactic of nationalist polemics; it transforms political disagreement into suspicion of treason.

This logic was reinforced by the very structure of the 2018 election, in which the FCC's opponents (the opposition, civic movements, and international partners) raised criticisms

regarding respect for the Constitution and the transparency of the process. In response, invoking sovereignty made it possible to reframe the criticism as "" interference. It is important, however, to qualify this: our lexical analysis establishes the prominence of sovereignty-related vocabulary, not the frequency or exact form of attacks against opponents. This aspect falls within the scope of examining the concordances of the term "sovereignty" in the corpus, which constitutes a natural extension of this work.

This process can be linked to what Billig (1995) describes as the production of a national "we" that functions implicitly through the designation of an "they." In the Congolese context, this distinction is all the more charged given that the country's history from colonization to regional conflicts offers a rich repertoire of instances of interference. Stearns (2022) notes, regarding the eastern part of the country, how the issue of intervention by neighbors and external powers has had a lasting impact on perceptions of insecurity. The vocabulary of sovereignty draws from this reservoir of memory.

In Charaudeau's (2005) framework, this dual function corresponds to the construction of an ethos of credibility (the speaker is trustworthy because he loves his country) and an ethos of identification (he is close to the people because he shares their values). The disqualification of the adversary is the flip side of this strategy: it consists of denying the other party access to these very same qualities. The effectiveness of the strategy depends on the audience's receptiveness. In a climate of distrust toward institutions, portraying the opponent as alien to national interest may resonate; it may also come across as a tired tactic if the audience feels that the speaker himself has strayed from what he claims to defend.

4.3. Limitations, Contradictions, and the Erosion of Words

The intensive use of patriotic vocabulary has its weaknesses. The first is the imbalance between registers. The near absence of the term "citizenship" (12 occurrences, 2.6%) indicates that the relationship between the government and the governed is conceived in terms of belonging rather than rights. Yet a discourse of legitimation that speaks of "the people" without mentioning "the citizen" leaves the question of what the government owes to those it invokes devoid of substance. This is a functional contradiction: "the people" are invoked as a source of legitimacy but are not, in the discourse, endowed with the attributes that would enable them to withdraw that legitimacy.

The second vulnerability is the erosion of words. Krieg-Planque (2009) points out that a phrase is susceptible to polemical appropriation: the more a word is used by one actor, the more it becomes available to their opponents, who can seize upon it to challenge its use. "People" and "sovereignty" are precisely the words that all sides claim as their own. The opposition may claim that it defends the people against those in power, and that true sovereignty lies with the voters. By relying heavily on these words, the FCC exposes itself to a semantic contest whose outcome it cannot control.

The third vulnerability lies in the relationship between words and deeds. The language of patriotism has performative power as long as it is credible; when it is perceived as out of step with actual practices, it fuels cynicism. Mbembe (2000) has emphasized the performative nature of power in the postcolony and its capacity, among other things, to provoke derision. From this perspective, the patriotic rhetoric of a contested regime can produce the opposite effect of what is intended.

4.4. The Triad of People, Nation, and Homeland: Defining the Community

The three terms "people" (147), "nation" (58), and "homeland" (62) total 267 occurrences, or 57.7% of the corpus. They address the same question: Who constitutes the community in whose name the government speaks? The "people" is the community of the governed; the "nation," the political and historical community; the "homeland," the community of attachment. Their combined use allows discourse to shift seamlessly from one register to another from the sociological to the legal to the emotional.

This flexibility offers a rhetorical advantage. It makes it possible to address different audiences simultaneously: the people as voters, the nation as institutions, and the homeland as a source of attachment. It also comes at a cost, which Bourdieu (2001) helps us understand: the symbolic power of naming presupposes that the designation is recognized; yet words that are so all-encompassing are vulnerable to challenges regarding their scope. Who are the people? Who belongs to the nation? These questions are not neutral in a country where the definition of belonging has, on several occasions, been a source of conflict.

The fact that citizenship is underrepresented in this system is, in this regard, significant. Citizenship is the form through which belonging becomes a legal status, with rights that can be claimed. Discourse favors forms of symbolic belonging, which do not create equivalent obligations for those in power. Here we see the classic opposition between a patriotism of loyalty which requires everyone to adhere and a republican

patriotism which requires everyone to participate and exercise oversight (Viroli, 1995).

4.5. Considerations and Perspectives

Three key findings emerge. On a descriptive level, the study establishes the quantitative structure of the FCC's patriotic vocabulary: a high density (3.73%), a concentration around "people" and "sovereignty," and a lack of references to "citizenship." From an interpretive perspective, it suggests interpreting this structure as a strategy of legitimization through identification and protection rather than through the law. From a methodological perspective, it demonstrates that a limited corpus and a well-defined lexical field are sufficient to produce interpretable results, provided they are contextualized.

The scope of these findings must be assessed with caution. The study does not claim to explain the outcome of the 2018 election, which was influenced by multiple factors (political power dynamics, the organization of the electoral process, disputes over the results, and the positions of external partners) factors that the Carter Center report (2019) analyzes from a legal and technical perspective. It offers a complementary perspective that of language by showing how an outgoing government sought to represent itself and frame the stakes of the election. This perspective is valuable only when considered in relation to the other dimensions of the electoral contest; taken in isolation, it risks treating words as the cause of what they are, for the most part, merely an expression of.

An analysis of concordances and co-occurrences, which would help document the contexts in which "people" and "sovereignty" are used and verify the hypotheses put forward in 4.2. The second step is a comparison with opposition corpora and with earlier speeches from the presidential camp, in order to determine whether the observed hierarchy is specific to the 2018 FCC or whether it is part of a more general pattern in Congolese political discourse.

Hypothesis H1, concerning lexical concentration, is confirmed: "people" and "sovereignty" account for 243 of the 463 occurrences, or 52.5%, and the top four forms account for 78.4% of these. Hypothesis H2, concerning the imbalance between registers, is also confirmed: the political-territorial register accounts for 78.4% of the corpus, compared to 2.6% for the civic register—a ratio of more than thirty to one.

Hypothesis H3, concerning the legitimizing function, is supported but not proven. The frequency data are consistent with it: a vocabulary focused on words of identification and protection is consistent with a strategy of qualifying the speaker. However, full proof would require examining the segments where these words appear, in order to verify that they are indeed associated with praise of the speaker and the casting of doubt on the adversary' . We therefore consider H3 to be a plausible and well-argued interpretation, which an analysis of concordances could help to confirm or refine.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to examine how patriotism functions as a strategy for legitimizing power in the FCC's campaign discourse during the 2018 presidential elections. A lexical analysis of a corpus of 12,420 words identified 463 occurrences of nine forms related to the patriotic domain, representing 3.73% of the corpus. It established a clear hierarchy: "people" (147) and "sovereignty" (96) account for 52.5% of the occurrences, with the top four forms comprising 78.4%, while "citizenship" (12) represents only 2.6%.

The interpretation of these results leads to three conclusions. First, the FCC's patriotism is a patriotism of identification and protection: it aims to make the speaker the guardian of the people and the defender of sovereignty. Second, this strategy serves a dual function of qualifying the speaker and disqualifying the opponent, the latter of whom may be portrayed as suspect of interference. Finally, it has limitations: a lack of civic content, vulnerability to polemical appropriation of the terms by competitors, and a risk of losing credibility due to the gap between rhetoric and practice.

These conclusions should be interpreted with caution, given the size of the corpus, the choice of forms, and the absence, at this stage, of a systematic analysis of contexts. Nevertheless, they open up a line of research: a comparative study of patriotic discourses in Congolese political discourse, from the MPR to current political contests, which would help determine whether the language of patriotism serves to build the nation or, more often, to justify the power that claims to embody it.

From a practical standpoint, these findings call on political actors, the media, and observers to pay closer attention to the structure of discourses of legitimation. A discourse that frequently invokes the people and sovereignty but says little about citizenship raises specific questions: What rights are guaranteed? What obligations are assumed? What mechanisms allow the people invoked to hold those in power accountable? Only under these conditions can patriotism cease to be a mere instrument of legitimization and become a principle of democratic accountability.

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