

**“The Elite vs. The People’s Party of Canada: Maxime Bernier and the Manifestation of Populism in Canada”**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this Major Research Paper (MRP) is to determine if measuring populism is possible simply by reading political leaders' tweets. In this MRP, the manifestation of populism in Canada is measured by analyzing the tweets of the People's Party of Canada leader Maxime Bernier, Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer, New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau. This MRP seeks to determine whether Maxime Bernier or any other federal party leader is a populist by analyzing their tweets during the 2019 federal election campaign through a detailed coding scheme. Before analyzing the tweets using a mix of quantitative and qualitative research analyses, I provide a literature review and a clear definition of the term populism. I also present a short history of populism in Canada and determine where the applicable party leaders fit into this history today. A main challenge with identifying populism is that it is widespread on the right and on the left. I observed that both Bernier and Singh are populists. This result aligned with the literature on populism that confirms populism can be found anywhere along the political spectrum.

**Keywords:** Populism, Canadian Politics, Electoral Politics, Elections, Twitter, Political Parties

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## **Introduction**

Can you tell if a political leader is a populist simply by reading their tweets? The topic of this Major Research Paper (MRP) is on the manifestation of populism in Canada in tweets sent during the 2019 federal election campaign by the People's Party of Canada (PPC) leader Maxime Bernier, Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) leader Andrew Scheer, New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau. This MRP seeks to determine whether Bernier or any other federal party leader is a populist, to do so, I will be analyzing their tweets during the election campaign using a detailed coding scheme. The research question for this MRP is the following: "*Is Maxime Bernier a populist?*" Two fairly recent important events in the world, Brexit in the United Kingdom and the election of President Donald Trump in the United States, have sparked and nurtured nationalist sentiments across the globe. Populism as a topic is an important one because it is a global phenomenon. I was interested to investigate whether Canada could be immune to similar nationalist, xenophobic and anti-establishment sentiments. The relevant literature indicates an increase in these trends with the surge of populist Canadian premiers such as Ontario's Doug Ford, Quebec's François Legault and Alberta's Jason Kenney. I am interested in determining whether Bernier could be defined as a populist and whether any sharp similarities or contrasts could be found between Bernier and the other three federal party leaders. The rationale of the proposed study is to demonstrate the dangers of right-wing populism and to highlight signs of these increasing trends in North America. Scholars agree there is an increase in populism around the world, but they measure it in very different ways.

This MRP will proceed as follows. I will first be defining populism. I spend a large part of this essay debating whether Bernier is a populist. Therefore, I thought it was important to define the term thoroughly by offering a concise literature review. Secondly, I will give a succinct

overview of Canada's history of populism and determine how the historical perspective of populism explains the presence of populism today at both the provincial and federal levels. Then, I will be providing some context on Bernier's political experience and an overview of the policies put forward by the PPC. Following that, I will explain how I measure populism with a detailed coding scheme I created. I will apply this to the tweets sent by the four federal party leaders preceding the 2019 federal election. Keeping in mind the research question, I will analyze each leader's tweets with the help of the coding scheme, and I will determine if Bernier and the other party leaders are populists.

### **Literature Review: What is Populism?**

In recent years, populism has become a popular buzzword, often found in newspapers and magazines worldwide. Some scholars, such as Mudde (2004, p.542) argue it has become "mainstream in the politics of Western democracies". This has not always been the case. Only twenty years ago, Professor Taggart (2000, p.10) found it "surprising how little attention populism has received as a concept". The difficulty with the term populism is that its definition has broadened and evolved in recent years. But it has usually been known as a "notoriously vague term". (Canovan, 1999, p.3) Many people, including Cohen (2018) of The New York Times want to retire the word populism completely since its usage has lost its true meaning. Many scholars in the field of political science and international relations not only disagree on the definition but also have varying opinions on whether populism is an ideology, a movement, a strategy, or a style. According to Panizza, (2005, p.1) populism has become "an analytical attribution rather than a term with which most political actors would willingly identify". Bernier might be the exception rather than the rule by self-proclaiming himself as a populist. Definitions of populism go back decades. One of the first is from Peter Wiles. (1969) He wrote that populism as an ideology "is

loose, and attempts to define it exactly arouse derision and hostility”. (Wiles, 1969, p.167) The term has evolved quite a bit since then, as more scholars have become interested in the topic and have enriched the debate by providing new definitions and ways to measure populism. Most scholars agree that populism has existed for centuries and that it is here to stay since it is embedded in the political landscape and vocabulary.

In Meny and Surel’s (2002) book *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, populism is debunked as an ambiguous term torn between ideology and function. Meny and Surel (2002) deduce that populist leaders need to replace the existing elite. The populists portray themselves as having the best intentions and they will do what is best for “the people”, whereas the elite in power are dishonest and corrupt. That same year, Taggart (2002, p.67) published *Populism and The Pathology of Representative Politics* in which he outlined the strong connection populism has with a sense of belonging to a particular country or land, he calls the heartland. It “represents an idealized conception of the community” and a “construction of an ideal world”. (Taggart, 2002, p.67) Taggart (2002) argues populist leaders’ perception of “the people” is often self-perceived or self-idealized. For example, a populist leader in Hungary will not perceive “the people” as immigrants or visible minorities. They are likely to be white and Catholic. Panizza (2005, p.17) goes further on the subject by reiterating the importance of interpreting “the people” as a homogenous group that comes together to fight against a “threatening heterogeneity”. “The people” often share common grievances that incentivize them to unify in order to fight for a common objective. According to Canovan, (1999, p.2) populists self-identify themselves as “true democrats”. They are vocal enough to take concrete action on grievances and injustices shared by “the people”, often consistently ignored by past and current governments and the media. Canovan (1999) maintains populist leaders favor direct democracy, such as referendums, in order to show

they want to give power back to “the people” and give “the people” the impression they are in control of their future and the policies put forward.

Populism is a complex term to define. This is in large part because populists can be found in any country and can be found anywhere along the political spectrum. A main challenge with identifying populism is that it is widespread on the right and on the left. Examples include late President Chávez in Venezuela, Greece’s Syriza Party and MP Geert Wilders in the Netherlands. According to Mudde (2004) (Molly, 2018), the most successful populists today are on the right, particularly the far-right. Populism is often associated and even wrongly interchanged with the far-right. There exists a vast literature on the populist left, most notably by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. However, I will be focusing on common characteristics and components of a right-wing populist, since this is how Bernier would identify himself. Right-wing populists often share similar views on topics such as nationalism, the establishment or the existing elite, and immigration policy, to name a few. Populism is often characterized as a thin-centered ideology (Mudde, 2004), meaning that beliefs surrounding nationalism and xenophobia are often mistakenly interchanged and associated with populism. Politicians such as Marine Le Pen in France, Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Donald Trump in the United States are examples of politicians on the far-right who combine populism with nativism and authoritarianism. (Molloy, 2018) It is important, however, to stress not all populists are xenophobic and xenophobia is not populism. (Mudde, 2017)

Populism was awarded the 2017 “Word of the Year” award by Cambridge University Press. Mudde (2017) argues there is so much buzz around the word because it is often poorly defined and not used in the right context. Müller (2016) argues populists are a danger to democracy since they are veering more and more towards the far-right. The problem is that far-right populists combine populism with authoritarianism and nativism, which is why, Mudde (2017) argues we

should not allow the popularity of the word populism to hide the xenophobic sentiments of the far-right. Müller (2016) agrees with this assessment and says we should stop the inflationary use of the term populism. We should not be grouping Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party in the UK, Greece's Syriza Party, Spain's Podemos Party with the US' Trump, Hungary's Orbán and Turkey's Erdoğan. The term has become a catchall term. It must be emphasized that populism is neither right-wing nor left-wing, although individual populists can be found in both camps. (Mudde, 2017) For the purposes of this paper, I use Mudde's definition of populism:

a thin centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. (Mudde, 2004, p.543)

To determine whether Bernier is a populist or not, I will look first at his communication style. In the current literature, there is a broad consensus that populists use simplistic language in order for their message to be understood by all audiences. Their vocabulary is easy to follow. They use short and simple sentences. Politicians with a good education and impressive work experience can often appear out of touch with the average voter. Populists use this to their advantage. They try to relate to the "average Joe", even if they are in fact more educated and skilled than their electorate. A common trait among populist leaders is their "cult of the leader" personality. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p.63) make the claim that populist leaders are often portrayed as "masculine and potentially violent". It is true that most populist leaders have been and continue to be men and are often described as being very personable and charismatic. They are often good looking and have an ability to interact with the "ordinary people". Populists are usually found in charismatic political parties, which are political parties where people vote because they like the candidate, as opposed to the proposed policies put forward by the party. Charismatic parties tend to have lower coordination costs since they rely on the leader drawing in voters. Many populist leaders will

nurture this cult of personality phenomenon, often seen in past authoritarian regimes. By using the cult of personality to their advantage, the populist will usually speak about themselves, their achievements and their emotions (Van Aelst et al, 2012), and what they would do differently if they were in power, in order to prove to the electorate they are the right leader for them. A much-researched populist, President Trump, would often boast and show off his past personal and professional achievements on Twitter. Populists online need to find a balance between by being emotional (Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010), by sharing revealing relevant personal insights, and being informal (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), by being direct, honest, simple, and without pretension.

Bernier is objectively good looking and charismatic. Forrest (2019) describes him as “charming, charismatic, [and] well-dressed”. That is not enough since Loreto (2018) points out, he is “not famous for being a capable and sophisticated operator” in either official language. He is known, however, for speaking from the heart, which usually translates well to voters. An interviewee named Lina Lessard from Bernier’s riding in La Beauce in St-Georges admitted: “He [Bernier] is an honest man. Other politicians just say what they think you want to hear.” (The Canadian Press, 2019b) Bernier once said people are fed up with politicians not being consistent with their statements. He said: “People like authenticity and I think I have the courage of my convictions and am authentic. That’s why people like what I’m doing.” (Iverson, 2018) In addition, Bernier said that politicians and bureaucrats in Ottawa “are disconnected from ordinary citizens”, which is why he says he wants to create policies that are simple, more relatable and more in touch with “the people”. (Geddes, 2018)

### **Canada’s Experience with Populism**

The term populism first gained traction back in the late 19th century in the US. (Cohen, 2018) “Prairie populists” gathered momentum and were initially well received in the 1890s.

Farmers supported more robust regulation of capitalism, this movement travelled to Canada, to various parts of South America and parts of Europe, especially in Russia. (Baker, 2019) Academics became increasingly curious about the populist phenomenon so, they created the first ever academic conference on populism in 1967 at the London School of Economics. (Baker, 2019) The summary report of the conference read: “There can at present be no doubt about the importance of populism, [...] But no one is clear what it is.” (Baker, 2019) It is surprising, to say the least, that there is still no consensus on the definition despite 50 years of contributions on the subject. Many of the circumstances have changed since the first conference in 1967. Globalization being the main aspect with improved information and communications technology, which in turn, helped spread ideas faster, expanded awareness of striking inequalities and the failure of the establishment of elites dealing with these important issues. Social media has helped bring these issues to the forefront. According to political theorists Mouffe and Laclau, this increasing awareness of striking inequalities should be a strong motivation for people to come together to work towards improving the quality of life and living standards, since it is an effective strategy to revive politics on the left. (Rice-Oxley & Kalia, 2018)

Canada, like the US, has a long history of populism and it continues to be an important political movement and ideology in politics. Like in most countries with a history of populism, Canada has experienced populism both on the left and the right. Some examples of right-wing populists include the Social Credit Party headed by Ernest Manning that lasted from the 1930s to the 1990s, the Ralliement créditiste du Québec in the 1970s and most recently the Reform Party of Canada established by Ernest Manning’s son Preston in the 1980s. Mudde (2004, p.547) argues the Social Credit Party in Canada was “one of the most successful populist movements” because they largely consulted “the people” in order to effectively represent them. According to the Social

Credit Party: “the people should be consulted about the broad parameters of policy while experts should produce mechanisms to bring this policy about”. (Mudde, 2004, p. 547) There have also been left-wing Canadian populists, such as the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), established by Tommy Douglas in the 1930s, and the United Farmers of Alberta, established in the early 1900s. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p.22) say populism in North America often “emerged spontaneously and been characterized by regional mobilization and weak organization”. They (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p.22) make specific reference to Premier Preston Manning’s leadership in Alberta as a movement with “relatively weak central leadership and organization”. On the other hand, Moffitt (2016, p.44) argues Manning was effective with his use of language to convey he understood the needs and grievances of “the people”. His own Charter even declared: “we believe in the common sense of the common people” (Reform Party of Canada, 1993, p.2). According to Moffitt, (2016, p.44) Manning was effective in making the distinction of being one with “the people” by “denial of expert knowledge, and the championing of ‘common sense’ against the bureaucrats, technocrats, representatives or ‘guardians of our interests’”.

The American and Canadian populist movements have remained similar, as they were in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with a strong emphasis on agrarian populism in rural areas in Canada’s western provinces and America’s Southwest and Great Plains regions. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017) Similar to the agrarian populism in the late 19th century, where the farmers in the west were juxtaposed with the bankers and politicians in the east, the populism we are seeing today is very much pitted against the hatred of elites, as Potter (2019) describes as the “Laurentian elite in the Toronto/ Ottawa/ Montreal triangle and the institutions they control”. The common theme prevailed; two homogenous groups exist and one group represents the majority of people and their interests whereas the other group is corrupt, greedy and inward looking. Colin Robertson,

vice-president of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute said populism exists in Canada although many diplomats think there is less here than in their own countries. (Brewster, 2019) Despite Mudde (2016b, p.355) arguing Canada remains a “multiculturalist unicorn” in an increasingly divisive world, populism has existed in Canada for centuries and is here to stay.

Using populist techniques is not foolproof in gaining popularity, since it can sometimes seem inauthentic. Former Liberal Opposition Leader Michael Ignatieff’s (2008-2011) bus tour across Canada to meet “the people” was largely interpreted as a “performance”. (Moffitt, 2016, p.78) In recent years, Rob Ford, who was the mayor of Toronto from 2010 to 2014, saw himself as the representative of the working-class and the protector against a range of enemy others such as “city workers, downtowners, cyclists, transit users, refugees, gays and lesbians, protestors, and “thugs” (gang members)”. (Kipfer & Saberi, 2014, p.134) His brother Doug Ford won the Ontario provincial election in June 2018 running for the Progressive Conservatives. He promised to take on elites, who “drink their little bottle or glass of champagne with their pinkie up in the air”. (Proudfoot, 2018) Bernier is not Canada’s first populist politician and some argue that his views echo those of Doug Ford. (Bilefsky, 2019) Both men protest against the establishment and elite in Ottawa. Heading West, Premier Kenney of Alberta of the United Conservative Party elected in 2019 talked about “self-appointed smart people” in a province where the anti-establishment, anti-immigrant *gilets jaunes* (yellow vest) movement gathered a lot of support. (Drohan, n.d.) (Levinson-King, 2019) Although I would not categorize him as a populist yet, CPC leader Scheer used populist terminology when speaking about the federal carbon tax as a cash grab by elites, which is being taken away from hard-working Canadians. (Drohan, n.d.) Finally, Quebec Premier Legault and his right-leaning Coalition Avenir Québec Party, elected in 2018, introduced a controversial piece of legislation, Bill 21, restricting public servants from wearing religious

symbols. The law could also be described as a populist strategy. O'Donnell (2019) argues that anti-immigration is not rooted in populism, but in the specific Quebecois context of secularism.

Canada has a long history of populism beginning in the late 19th century to today with many populist politicians at the provincial level. Issues and priorities have varied and shifted, and the definition of “the people” has evolved over time. What stayed the same is there have always been two homogenous groups each claiming to represent the “the people”. I will be exploring below how Bernier fits into Canada’s populist experience.

### **The Rise and Fall of Maxime Bernier’s People’s Party**

Bernier has been in politics for decades, but the People’s Party is relatively new, it was created in 2018. Politics runs in the family. His father Gilles, was the MP for his old riding in Beauce from 1984 to 1997. Bernier Jr. began his career working with the Parti Québécois (PQ) leader Bernard Landry as a strong Quebec separatist in the late 1990s. He soon changed political parties. He won his first seat in the 2006 federal election in his father’s old riding, as a Conservative under Prime Minister Stephen Harper. He became an experienced MP and handled many important files. He was appointed to Minister of Industry (2006), Minister of Foreign Affairs (2007), and Minister of State (2011-2015). Bernier then ran for the CPC leadership in May 2017 losing by the skin of his teeth to Andrew Scheer who won 50.95% of the vote whereas Bernier won 49.05%. He created the People’s Party shortly afterward in August 2018. Bernier (2018) said he was creating a new political party because the Conservative Party was “too intellectually and morally corrupt to be reformed”. In over a year, Bernier managed to create a new federal political party, found candidates to run in all of Canada’s 338 federal electoral districts and participated in all the televised pre-election leaders’ debates. Although he thought his participation in the two official leaders’ debates would be pivotal for his party’s chances in the election, Bernier lost his seat in

Beauce to the Conservative candidate Richard Lehoux and no PPC member won their seat in the 2019 federal election. (The Canadian Press, 2019a) Some have doubted Bernier's intentions when he formed the PPC. Some have called it a "giant attention-getting exercise" against the Conservative Party. (Patriquin, 2019)

Although Bernier had the education and professional qualifications of being an MP with over 13 years of experience with many cabinet positions under PM Harper, he was always a controversial figure. Bernier switched from being a PQ separatist to a Conservative to now founder of the PPC, which made him lose credibility, as it does not prove to his supporters he is stable in his political views and convictions. He came under fire in 2008 after he left a confidential NATO briefing book at his then girlfriend's house. She had ties to the Hells Angels. His unusual tweets following the creation of the PPC stirred up new controversy. Bernier confirmed he was creating a populist party:

Something is happening in this country and I think the populist movement, it is happening in Canada. We're not apart from Europe and other countries and so but we are doing politics differently, smart populist political movement. We are speaking to the intelligence of Canadians, not to their emotions. (National Post Video File, 2019a)

He has also said the PPC is a populist party because it "proposes solutions to Canada's problems that radically differ from those of all the establishment parties". (Bernier, 2019) In an interview with CTV, when asked what populism meant to him, Bernier described it as doing politics differently, basing the party on serious reforms rather than "appealing to the emotions of Canadians". (CTV News Video File, 2019)

The main planks of the PPC platform were: curbing immigration, eliminating the deficit, ending federal subsidies to corporations, cutting funding to multiculturalism programs, removing the federal carbon tax, encouraging pipeline building and phasing out supply management for agricultural products. (The Canadian Press, 2019a) One of Bernier's most controversial electoral

promises was to cut immigration numbers in half to about 150,000 people per year. (National Post Video File, 2019b) This goes against expert assessments of Canada's need for more immigration to grow the economy. A combination of a low birth rate and the retirement of many baby boomers is creating a labor shortage in most provinces. (Tubb, 2019) According to Loreto (2018), Bernier gambled on whether the anti-immigrant sentiment would be enough to support his party. She says there has been a surge of anti-immigrant, white supremacist organization and activity across Canada, because these groups have managed to twist numbers surrounding refugees, migrants and immigration. (Loreto, 2018) Like many populists in Europe, Bernier has also focused on illegal immigration. The PPC said it would "fence off the areas where illegal border jumping is prevalent" and also give immigration preference to Muslims who "adhere to Western values" and who are persecuted for rejecting "political Islam". (National Post Staff, 2019) Bernier's district of Beauce is extremely monocultural. It is one of the ridings with the highest percentages of Caucasians in the country, with immigrants making up only 1.45% of the demographic. (Loreto, 2018) Canada is a highly multicultural and diverse society with a history of integrating newcomers, as well as having the most highly educated population in the OECD. This partly explains why Bernier's xenophobic rhetoric did not get traction. (Woodfinden, 2019) By attempting to replicate the xenophobic populism that exists in other countries in Europe, Bernier failed to resonate broadly with Canadians and the Canadian experience. According to McGill University Professor Kelly Gordon, scholars often talk about the "rule-of-thirds" with regards to immigration: "which identifies that one third of Canadians are happy with contemporary levels of immigration or want to see it raised, one third want to see levels reduced, and one third of Canadians move between these two poles". (O'Donnell, 2019) Bernier's anti-immigrant populism simply didn't move the latter volatile group. (O'Donnell, 2019)

Bernier also ran on banning political correctness. The PPC website says: “Canadians should be able to enjoy maximum freedom of conscience and expression as guaranteed in Section 2 of the *Charter*.” (Freedom of Expression: Protecting Canadians from Censorship and Discrimination.) Bernier also appears to have taken inspiration from President Trump through his extensive usage of social media, more specifically, Twitter. Scheer criticized Bernier’s use of Twitter during one of the leader’s debates and said: “You are making your policy based on trying to get likes and retweets from the darkest part of Twitter.” (Taylor-Vaisey & Dhopade, 2019) According to the Calgary Herald (2019), Bernier’s social media postings have shifted, they have gone from “being quirky and edgy to now being over the top rants and clumsy attacks.” Benjamin Ducol, the deputy director of the Center for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, said Bernier “is giving the extreme right a voice in the political mainstream”. (Bilefsky, 2019) In fact, the former leader of a US neo-Nazi group, a former Soldiers of Odin member and an official of the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida) group were among the signatories of the PPC’s registration to Elections Canada. (Russell & Bell, 2019)

I wanted to explore possible reasons why Bernier and the PPC failed to gain traction in the federal election. This would need to be further analyzed since this is perhaps too subjective, but it is important in the Canadian context. The first important reason for the failure of the PPC can be attributed to the novelty for new political parties to grow since Canada has a long history of the same parties being at the ballot box. Creating a new political party, which resonates with the electorate takes time, since it shifts political culture. A second important reason is Canada’s first-past-the-post electoral system, which makes it difficult for new smaller parties to be represented, as opposed to a proportional representation system. A third reason is the notion of “Canadian exceptionalism”, that is, Canadians pride themselves on being open and inclusive and, perhaps,

the PPC's policies were too exclusionary and were too far-right for Canada. This has to do very much with education levels, Canada has the most highly educated population in the OECD; 54% of Canadians graduated from post-secondary education according to the 2016 census, which does not go hand-in-hand with far-right politics and policies far-right populists propose. (Woodfinden, 2019) (Coyne, 2019) An educated population would most likely reject the notion that immigration should be reduced as there is a current labor shortage in several industries in all provinces, and most importantly that climate change is a real concern that needs to be addressed. Bernier clearly failed to advocate favorably for these two important policies. A large proportion of the Canadian population, 23% of Canadians were born outside the country, which is the highest among the Group of Eight and nearly double compared to the United States. (Coyne, 2019) It is difficult for xenophobia to gain traction in Canadian politics, since first and second-generation immigrants made up almost 40% of the electorate in 2011 and this number has increased dramatically in the last 9 years. (Warnica, 2019) Marche (2016) argues Canada is the last country on Earth to believe in multiculturalism, an obvious irony because: "We are most open to the world at the exact moment the world has closed." Since Canada is known for being a country of immigrants, the PPC's image tarnished drastically when it was known that its members had had affiliations with far-right groups known for hate speech.

A fourth reason why the PPC failed is that illegal immigration levels in Canada are not comparable to those in the United States or Europe. We have not shared similar experiences of terrorism and have not been exposed to the traumas associated with that, as much as in Europe. (Coyne, 2019) In part due to our geographic location and not being exposed to the kind of realities the Americans are facing on their southern border and the Europeans face on their eastern border, we are not exposed to the same kind of realities populist leaders use to their advantage to gain

support from the electorate. Furthermore, Marche (2016) has noted the positive aspect of our geography: “The happy accident of our location and borders means Canada has chosen immigration, rather than had immigration forced on it.” The Syrian refugee crisis is one of the most important events that re-sparked the popularity of populism in most of central and eastern Europe with the large influx of refugees, something Canada did not have imposed on it, but rather chose to welcome more than 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016. A fifth reason why the PPC failed, is that Bernier’s Party did not run a good campaign, nor did it have any “star” candidates. No candidate running for the PPC gained positive praise in the media and if they were in the media, it would often be to highlight past controversial views or past ties with far-right affiliations. Renata Ford, the widow of the late Toronto mayor Rob Ford, failed to gain any support with only 2.8% of the vote. As usual, the media played a large role in this election and while Bernier was much reported on during the campaign, he did not receive praise or support publicly from any major publications like Postmedia’s endorsement for the Conservatives or the Toronto Star’s endorsement for the Liberals.

### **Twitter: a Populist Paradise?**

With globalization and the rise of information and communications technology, it is easier to spread ideas now more than ever before. Although social media and populism should be used cautiously together, it is an effective tool to see how populist leaders gained and maintained support. I will be explaining why Twitter is a populist paradise. Mudde (2016a, pp.28-29) argues we are living in a “new populist era” in large part due to the increasing use of technological advancements and the presence of online media. The power of social media has made the spread of social movements around the world possible, such as the 2010-2011 “Twitter Revolution” which sparked the Tunisian revolution. It has also been a source of mobilization for supporters of

a politician or political party, for example in the lead up to Trump's presidential victory. Jungherr (2016), among others, argues that Twitter is used mainly to broadcast one's views as opposed to creating and exchanging a dialogue with one's followers. Twitter is a useful tool. It is free and easy to use, accessible to all, and simple to follow since a tweet has to be 280 characters or less. The use of Twitter by populist figures has been extensively studied in the last couple of years. Many of those studies underline how compatible populism is with social media. (Bartlett et al., 2011; Gerbaudo, 2014). Twitter has been used by populist politicians to mobilize support but also to foster debate, which has been increasingly polarizing and divisive. (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018) But more importantly, it is an effective and impulsive way to speak to and speak like many of their core followers. (Ott, 2017) Although research has focused on the divisive role of social media in populist campaigns, populists are hardly the only political actors who are social media savvy. Just because a politician is on Twitter does not make them a populist. (Postill, 2018)

As Kriesi (2014, p.363) says best, politicians can benefit from getting "direct, unmediated access to the people's grievances" through social media channels like Twitter. Although they meet people in-person, getting information online directly from "the people" has made life easier for populist leaders. Bartlett (2014, p. 93) argues that Twitter in particular is different than other platforms, since it is "distributed, non-hierarchical and democratic". Many populists can seem fake or inauthentic by pretending to care about "the people's" grievances, but this is not just a populist-centric fear, it is a fear for all programmatic political parties. Parties need to attract better support from voters because the former are expected to provide certain public goods to the electorate. Populists need to communicate specifics on how certain policies are aligned with the ideology of the voters, which takes a lot of resources and coordination. A common grievance found across the world is decreasing purchasing power. A politician would have to not only recognize the problem

but also share their platform on how they would overcome this obstacle. A challenge populists often face is to prove they understand grievances of “the people”. A useful way to express their understanding, is to communicate it through social media.

Populism can be many things, including an ideology, a movement, a strategy, or a style. Weyland (2001, p.14) asserts populism is a “political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers”. Populist leaders on social media have a particular communication style that is easily recognizable. A political communication style is defined as a “heterogeneous ensemble of ways of speaking, acting, looking, displaying, and handling things, which merge into a symbolic whole that immediately fuses matter and manner, message and package, argument and ritual”. (Pels, 2003, p. 45) Like most politicians, populists also have a distinct political communication style. Populists use a specific language, one that is “colourful and undiplomatic”, according to Canovan, (2004, p.242) in order to distinguish themselves from the elite, who are supposedly disconnected and inaccessible from “the people”.

Tweets, in particular, need to be provocative enough to spark a dialogue or controversial enough to encourage others to participate in the conversation. Politicians who are often provocative or aggressive online tend to get a strong pushback, but it creates more engagement and participation on their feeds. Mobilizing support online is often done through appealing to the emotions or fears of the electorate on negative feelings. For example, central European populists used fear of terrorism or violence in order to justify their policies against accepting Syrian refugees into their countries. (Alvares & Dahlgren, 2016). Based on the literature, populists are successful if they emphasize the sovereignty and rights of “the people”, attack the elites and purposely

exclude enemy “others”. Now that we understand the importance of populism and social media together, I will be outlining how to spot a populist on Twitter.

### **How is Populism Measured? A Research Strategy**

Although Bernier officially self-defined himself as a populist, I wondered if there was a way to measure if he is one or not by reading his tweets. With the help of a coding scheme detailed below on how to measure populism, I determined if Bernier is in fact a populist, like he says he is. In order to investigate the rise of populism in North America, I have taken inspiration from several scholars who have turned to social media for their research. I looked at active Twitter users and political candidates during the 2019 Canadian federal election campaign, Maxime (@MaximeBernier on Twitter), Andrew Scheer (@AndrewScheer), Jagmeet Singh (@theJagmeetSingh) and Justin Trudeau (@JustinTrudeau). I investigated whether Bernier is a populist and compared his tweets to the other three federal party leaders.

All of the peer-reviewed articles in the literature review were found online using Google Scholar, Omni through the University of Ottawa’s library website, and the ProQuest Politics Collection online database. They were found using keywords such as: “populism in Canada”, “nationalism”, “far-right”, and “measuring populism” and by using various search operator tools to narrow my search. The oldest article in this literature review dates back to 1969. However, the majority of the works were published more recently, roughly in the last five to seven years. I limited my search to English articles, although there is a vast literature of populism in Quebec in French. Zotero was used to save all peer-reviewed articles and newspaper articles as well as to help me create the bibliography.

Taking inspiration from other scholars who have measured populism by means of classical content analysis, (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007) (Hawkins, 2009), (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011)

(Pauwels, 2011) I attempted to do the same by analyzing tweets by means of a coding scheme. The reason I excluded Green Party leader Elizabeth May and Bloc Québécois leader Yves-François Blanchet's tweets from my analysis, is because I prioritized the four other party leaders and realized I had ample data to make a compelling analysis. Regarding the tweets, only original tweets from Bernier, Scheer, Singh and Trudeau were selected. I used the website *All My Tweets* to retrieve the politicians' tweets from the election campaign period, from September 11 to October 21, 2019. I copied and pasted each leader's tweets onto an Excel spreadsheet and removed all the non-pertinent tweets such as retweets and replies. All retweets, in which users share a tweet from another user were deleted as well as tweets where the message started with an @, which is a personal message directed to another account. I also made sure to delete all the French tweets. For the most part, each leader did a good job of ensuring each tweet was translated into the other official language. Trudeau had the most tweets during the time period, with a total of 351 tweets. Bernier followed with 273 tweets, Scheer with 267 tweets and Singh with 209 tweets.

The first theme I explored in the analysis is the leader's cult of personality or charismatic nature. In order to determine whether these politicians have a cult of personality or are charismatic, I counted how often and to what degree they spoke about themselves, their past achievements and accomplishments. Popan (2015, p.iv) defines cult of personality of state leaders as "quantitatively exaggerated and qualitatively extravagant public demonstration of praise of the leader". I determined if Bernier or the other party leaders are populist by pointing out how many times they said their name or used the "I" pronoun when speaking about themselves in their tweets. Populists need to find a balance between speaking about themselves and their accomplishments while downplaying their opponents as competition. Determining whether Bernier comes across as a cult of personality will give some insight into whether he is a populist or not. Having a cult of

personality or being charismatic are not the only measurements of populism, so I searched for other indicators below.

The second theme I looked for in the tweets, is how the leaders demonstrated they understood the will of the people. A characteristic that is often shared among populist elites is they claim to represent “the people”. (Müller, 2016) As explained above, populists will need to seem genuine and understanding of the struggles of the everyday person. To win over many different audiences is no simple task. Müller (2016) says populists need to do more than just be critical of elites. They need to show they know how to represent the people and their interests. According to Professor Hawkins (Rice-Oxley & Kalia, 2018), populists will use language to speak about “the people” by romanticizing them, he says employing adjectives such as “ordinary”, “hard-working” or “taxpaying” to describe the “noble masses” is likely to attract attention or support. It is ironic to say the least that a multi-billionaire such as Trump found support particularly from low-income and working-class rural Americans with limited social services, seeing as they would have been among the greatest beneficiaries of Republican-opposed programs, such as Obamacare. (Fukuyama, 2016) Oliver and Rahn (2016) argue populist leaders define the electorate as anyone who is not an elite and seek to surpass class or regional cleavages. Baggini (2016, pp. 23-24) says that by seeking the support of swing voters, populists neglect “the interests of everyone else, most notably the worst off. In professionalizing their campaigning, they have lost their grassroots connections and authenticity, instead becoming bland brands”. Examples of this can be seen by many populists around the world, such as Marine Le Pen who said: “It is time to free the French people from an arrogant elite” to Donald Trump who said: “People want to take back control of their countries and they want to take back control of their lives and the lives of their family”. (Rice-Oxley & Kalia, 2018) Populists need to ensure that when addressing “the people”, anyone can feel

part of the audience by offering a sense of belonging. This can be challenging since the audience members will often not share common cultural, economic or linguistic characteristics.

Populists, most commonly far-right populists, share the opinion that immigration levels are too high and need to be reduced. Many make reference to illegal immigration or point to the increasing numbers of refugees in the country. The Syrian refugee crisis sparked by the Syrian civil war, dating back to 2011, created a lot of tensions in Europe and a sharp divide between Western and Eastern Europe. Countries in Western Europe such as France and most importantly Germany took in many refugees whereas many Central and Eastern European countries did not want to take in even a single refugee. Hungary's Orbán went as far as saying the refugees were "Muslim invaders". (Wallen, 2018) Knowing full well immigration was at the centre of Bernier's campaign, it was interesting to analyze how he justified wanting to reduce immigration levels. As I read his tweets, I asked the following question: "*Does Bernier refer to the will of the people when justifying certain policies such as lower immigration levels, ending multiculturalism or climate skepticism?*" I watched for certain words to describe "the people". Examples included "we", "Canadians", "us", "society", "citizens", "taxpayers", and "hard-working Canadians". This is how I measured and determined if Bernier is people-centric enough to be deemed a populist.

The third theme I explored in the leaders' tweets was their take on the elite. In order to determine if Bernier is a populist, I asked the following question: "*Does Bernier criticize the elite in his tweets?*" Anti-elitism can be expressed in many different ways and the elite can be categorized by different people or organizations. Lusófna University Professor Claudia Álvares argues populist politicians put on a show online and do so intentionally, in order to get a reaction from their followers and the media. (Rice-Oxley & Kalia, 2018) She says: "populist politicians are revolutionising the ways in which politics is being performed, and they are performing it." (Rice-

Oxley & Kalia, 2018) Populist politicians tend to want to get a reaction from their followers by speaking about their political opponents, by vilifying, criticizing and attacking them online and aloud. Trump nicknamed his opponent Hillary Clinton “Crooked Hillary” during his campaign, which was reported on frequently in the media during the presidential campaign. I was interested in determining whether Bernier took a similar approach with his political rivals during the campaign, most importantly with his main competitor, Justin Trudeau.

Populists often resent or renounce support for international institutions. This was seen with many European leaders against the European Union and the European Commission, most recently seen with Britain’s exit from the European Union. It is not only a European phenomenon. It occurs also as populist politicians speak out against other international institutions like the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), among others. In Bernier’s tweets, I searched for a negative perception of the elite, either in describing political leaders, such as Trudeau, or international institutions, such as the UN. Words like the “elite”, the “corrupt”, the “establishment”, the “oligarchs”, the “Laurentian elite”, the “rich and powerful” are words I looked for in order to determine if Bernier point that the elite do not have “the people’s” best interests at heart and are working against them. As seen from the definitions above, specifically the one from Mudde (2004), populist leaders will need to ensure they highlight the differences between “the people” and the elite. In addition to that, they are likely to have a cult of personality.

## **Analysis of Tweets by Bernier, Scheer, Singh and Trudeau**

### **Maxime Bernier's Tweets**

Although Bernier's political career can be compared to a roller coaster with many ups and downs sprinkled with some controversies, Bernier still has an impressive political background. As I explained above, not only was he an MP for several years, he was Minister of Industry, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Small Business and Tourism. In none of the tweets analyzed did Bernier make reference to these achievements. I analyzed Bernier's 273 tweets between September 11 and October 21, 2019. His following has grown but as of mid-March 2020 he has only 103,600 Twitter followers. The first theme I searched for in Bernier's tweets was his cult of personality and charismatic leadership, or lack thereof. I looked to see if Bernier tweeted about his past professional and personal achievements. After going through all the collected tweets, I deduced that Bernier did not speak much about his past professional experiences. A tweet I highlighted below, in Figure 1, shows Bernier comparing himself to the other leaders by saying he is running on "bold reforms and sound policies that will benefit ALL Canadians", as opposed to the other leaders making false promises in order "to buy your [the people's] votes". Perhaps Bernier took the decision to not boast about his political career in order to try to differentiate himself from the other political elites in Ottawa, by focusing on the PPC and his goals for the future.

**Figure 1**

**Source: Twitter**

This strategy might be an attempt to divert attention from his political career and limit criticism by the media and political rivals. It also makes Bernier seem more relatable to the average Canadian. By not showing off his education and past professional experience, he may appear more humble. Bernier did, however, highlight his private sector experience by comparing himself to Scheer. As highlighted in Figure 2, Bernier bragged about his past professional experiences as a lawyer and professional in various organizations such as the National Bank and the Montreal Economic Institute. While going through his tweets, I was trying to see how often he would speak about himself or the PPC. I observed that he often shared his itinerary while campaigning. He would say where he was on a certain day and his plan for the day. On September 24, he tweeted: “Come meet me and our candidates at our rally tomorrow evening (Wednesday September 25) in Vancouver!”. This was not only a good way to promote the PPC but also good publicity for the candidates running in certain districts. In most of his tweets announcing a public engagement, Bernier included a link to his website for more information on the specific event.

**Figure 2**

**Source: Twitter**

He also shared newspaper articles about his campaign, including items that appeared in the Toronto Star, the Calgary Herald, CTV News and others. I was interested to see how many times Bernier spoke in the first person, for example he tweeted the “I” pronoun 29 times and said “me” 14 times out of the 273 tweets. For the most part, it seemed like he was writing and in charge of his tweets. On October 16, Bernier tweeted: “I explain to every Beauce voter I meet that a vote for me is a vote for an MP they’ve known for 13 years and who’s always been there to defend their interests. Also, it’s a vote to get rid of Trudeau!” This shows that Bernier is involved in the writing and management of his tweets. We got a glimpse into the private life of Bernier through his tweets. The two examples I included in Figure 3 show Bernier with his wife at a football game and his wife visiting a retiring home on the campaign trail. We could have learned a lot more about Bernier than he shared through his tweets, which is important since most people vote not only for the political party but because they like the candidate. Bernier did not mention he is a father of two daughters. This contrasts with Trudeau, who often speaks about his family and even uses his experience as a father to justify certain policies like the Canada Child Benefit. I am not convinced

Bernier could be characterized as having a cult of personality since he did not often speak about himself or his past achievements. He focused on tweeting about his itinerary, which does not give a glimpse into the real life of Bernier from the electorate's perspective.

### **Figure 3**



**Source: Twitter**

I asked the following question as I went through his tweets regarding the second theme of the will of the people: *“Does Bernier refer to the will of the people when justifying certain policies such as lower immigration levels, ending multiculturalism or climate skepticism?”* Taking two tweets highlighted in Figure 4, Bernier brought forward a survey by political scientists at the University of Toronto that asserts one third of Canadians support multiculturalism, one third oppose it whereas the other one third approve of it, as long as immigrants integrate fully into Canadian society. In this scenario, Bernier is in fact referring to the will of the people in this survey in order to justify the position he and the PPC took on multiculturalism during the election.

**Figure 4**

**Maxime Bernier** @MaximeBernier

1/ Reading the news, you might think the vast majority of Canadians support multiculturalism.

That's not at all the case, as this piece by [@JohnIbbitson](#) reminds us this morning.

There is a wide difference of opinion between Canadians and their political and media elites.

**John Ibbitson** @JohnIbbitson · Sep 13, 2019  
From me in the impact of Bill 21 on the federal election. [theglobeandmail.com/politics/artic...](#)

3:40 PM · Sep 14, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

218 Retweets 462 Likes

**Maxime Bernier** @MaximeBernier

2/ In reality, according to surveys by UofT political scientists, about 1/3 of Canadians support multiculturalism, 1/3 oppose it, and another 1/3 approve of it but only as long as immigrants integrate fully into Canadian society.

Erin Tolley, a political scientist at University of Toronto, points to research she and co-author Randy Besco conducted that shows about a third of Canadians oppose multiculturalism, a third support it, and a third are "conditional multiculturalists" who, as they wrote, "approve of immigration and ethnic diversity, but only under certain conditions" – the most important being that immigrants integrate fully into Canadian society.

3:41 PM · Sep 14, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

91 Retweets 242 Likes

**Maxime Bernier** @MaximeBernier

3/ So, potentially 2/3 of Canadians support the [@peoplespca](#) position, which is to abolish official multiculturalism and focus on the integration of immigrants.

Why then is it systematically portrayed as a fringe position in the media?

Remember: WE ARE THE MAJORITY.

3:42 PM · Sep 14, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

149 Retweets 450 Likes

**Source: Twitter**

A common phrase in Bernier's tweets was: "You have a choice". This is a very populist thing to say since it shows a willingness to give power back to "the people". When justifying certain policies he proposed, Bernier brought up certain polls or surveys. On September 16, Bernier tweeted: "Two weeks ago, a Léger poll showed 52% of Canadians want to see me in debates. Today another poll says a majority of Quebecers think the same. Will the @debates\_can respect the democratic right of these Canadians to hear all sides before voting?" Another tweet from

Bernier on September 20 read: “Poll says 76% of respondents think political correctness—loosely defined as the avoidance of certain words or actions that might offend marginalized groups—has gone “too far.” Once again, the @peoplespca represents the MAJORITY of Canadians.” By bringing up certain polls and surveys like the two examples just mentioned, Bernier is proving to his readers that he is listening to “the people” and their opinions. Bernier hardly romanticized “the people” by describing them as “hardworking”, “ordinary” or “taxpaying”. He tweeted on September 27: “We will end the corrupt practice of pandering and buying votes from interest groups and political clienteles with taxpayers’ money.” He did however tweet about “Canadians” over 30 times and on October 16, he tweeted: “The PPC only offers the same sound policies that will benefit ALL Canadians.” He put the emphasis on the word all by capitalizing it to show that he is interested in helping everyone, not just a certain portion of the population, like the very wealthy. Overall, I would say Bernier indeed referred to the will of the people by bringing up certain polls or surveys to justify certain policies, such as lowering immigration. When referring back to Mudde’s (2004, p.543) definition that “politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”, Bernier asserts in many ways he is a representative of “all Canadians” and will introduce policies based on their views.

The third theme I probed in Bernier’s tweets was his critique of the elites and how he showed disdain for them. For this theme, I asked the following question: “*Does Bernier criticize the elite in his tweets?*” Some tweets collected in Figure 5 prove that Bernier often criticizes his opponents. By criticizing PM Trudeau, Bernier attacks Trudeau’s image of acceptance and unity by turning it against him by saying Trudeau is in fact being divisive. When speaking about Scheer and other Conservative MPs, he goes as far as saying the Conservative Party of Canada is an

“intellectually and morally corrupt party”. We can clearly see that Bernier is criticizing his political opponents in these tweets.

### **Figure 5**



**Source: Twitter**

As seen in Figure 6, Bernier tweeted on September 11, the day the election campaign started. He made reference to the SNC-Lavalin case whereby the Canadian Ethics Commissioner eventually found PM Trudeau attempted to influence the Minister of Justice and Attorney General in intervening in an ongoing criminal case against SNC-Lavalin. This scandal tarnished Trudeau's image in the media. Bernier used this to his advantage by bringing this to the attention of his Twitter followers. Bernier used the words “corruption and crony capitalism” when referring to the scandal. He also used the word “Ottawa”, implying that other politicians fall under this “corruption and crony capitalism” category. So, we can see that in this particular tweet, Bernier is in fact criticizing the elites, in this case PM Trudeau but also “Ottawa” [politicians] writ large.

**Figure 6**

**Source: Twitter**

Going back to the first tweet in Figure 4, Bernier said: “There is a wide difference of opinion between Canadians and their political and media elites.” Although Bernier criticized Trudeau, Scheer and his other opponents significantly in his tweets, he could have used the elite rhetoric more to his advantage, as populists usually do. He only mentioned the word “elite” twice in the time frame analyzed. The other time was on September 18, when he said: “Half of Canadians want lower immigration. Why is it “controversial”? A large proportion don’t believe climate alarmists nonsense. Why is it “controversial”? Is it controversial for Canadians or for a small elite that doesn’t want to hear these ideas?” Bernier took advantage of the SNC-Lavalin scandal. He tweeted about it a lot during the election campaign. He used the term “corrupt” nine times and “corruption” four times in his tweets. He even started a new hashtag, #LibConCorruption, which he used on a few occasions. Bernier not only criticized his opponents like Trudeau by tweeting on September 20: “He’s a fraud and has been the worst Canadian Prime Minister in recent memory”, but he also criticized international institutions like the UN. He tweeted on October 2: “The UN is promoting

the crazy notion that humans are “a disease infecting our planet.” This is not a conspiracy theory. They’re exploiting every supposed “global crisis” to increase their power and influence. The PPC is the only party that rejects this globalist ideology.” It is unclear whether Bernier would have mentioned corruption as much as he did were it not for the SNC-Lavalin case. He often tweeted in order to vilify his opponents by using the word “hypocrite” nine times and “liar” three times when referring to the other federal party leaders.

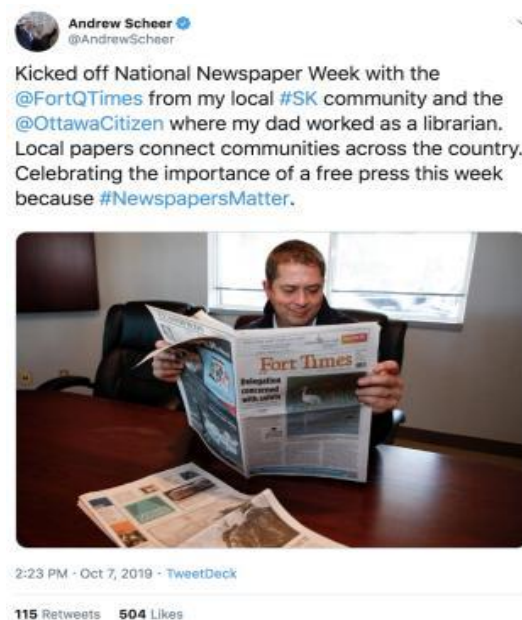
Referring back to Mudde’s (2004) definition, Bernier portrays a society divided into two separate groups and he argues politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. A tweet from October 20, summarizes it best: “Imagine how Canadian politics would be insipid and irrelevant without the @peoplespca! Five centrist and leftist parties agreeing on almost everything. No debate on issues that matter to Canadians. YOU HAVE A CHOICE”. It is clear that Bernier is a populist although he did not appear to meet one of the criteria, which is the cult of personality. He did speak frequently about the will of the people and his distrust of elites. Bernier managed to create a balance between tweeting about his goals and criticizing his opponents. On balance, his tweets indicate he is a populist since he ultimately sees society to be divided into two “homogenous and antagonistic groups” and that “politics should be an expression of the general will of the people”. (Mudde, 2004, p.543)

### **Andrew Scheer’s Tweets**

Such as with Bernier’s tweets, I began my analysis of Scheer’s tweets by looking for evidence he was trying to create a cult of personality. I went through Scheer’s 267 tweets in the period analyzed. By mid-March 2020, Scheer had a Twitter following of 204,700 people. A major challenge Scheer had to grapple with in the federal election campaign was that many Canadians did not know who he was or the values he stood for. The election campaign was an opportunity

for Scheer to introduce himself to Canadians. In contrast to Bernier, Scheer explicitly spoke about what he would do differently if he were to become the next PM. In fact, out of the 267 tweets, he tweeted 25 times “as Prime Minister” he will do certain things, which made him come across as confident and assertive. Like Bernier, Scheer updated his followers on where he was campaigning. On October 15, he tweeted: “I’m in La Prairie, Qc tonight where I will outline my priorities for Québec.” Like Bernier, Scheer very rarely spoke about his personal or family life. I put together in Figure 7, some glimpses into Scheer’s life he shared with his audience. We did not learn a great deal about Scheer through his tweets. Granted he shared pictures of himself and his wife on the campaign trail, said he is a father to three daughters and that his father worked as a librarian. But we did not learn much about Scheer’s personal or political background. Scheer did not tweet about the fact he was first elected in the federal election of 2004 at the age of 25 and eventually became the youngest Speaker of the House of Commons in Canadian history.

### **Figure 7**



(Continued on next page) Source: Twitter



### Source: Twitter

Scheer tweets as though he is speaking. He tweets in the first person and used “I” 96 times, an indication he writes his own tweets. Overall, I cannot say Scheer demonstrated a “quantitatively exaggerated and qualitatively extravagant public demonstration of praise” of himself to show that he has a cult of personality. (Popan, 2015, p.iv) Like Bernier, Scheer cannot be characterized as having a cult of personality since he did not often speak about himself or his past accomplishments. He tweeted about his schedule, which does not give a glimpse into the real life of Scheer from the electorate’s perspective.

Regarding the tweets surrounding the “will of the people”, Scheer’s message of affordability was at the centre of his campaign, a message that should have resonated with many Canadians. The Conservative Party’s slogan “It’s Time For You To Get Ahead”, was used a great deal in Scheer’s tweets, a record number of 144 times in the timeframe analyzed. Scheer’s focus was on affordability. He talked a lot about money. He used the term 74 times in his tweets and also talked about putting “money back in people’s pockets” or some variation of that phrase over 50

times. To my surprise, Scheer did not romanticize “the people” by using various adjectives to describe them such as “ordinary” or “taxpaying”. Scheer had to ensure Conservatives came across as though they understood the grievances of “the people”. He had to remove the perception that he and his fellow Conservatives worked for the richest Canadians. Scheer tweeted on September 11: “Momentum continues to build for strong conservative governments dedicated to putting more money in the pockets of hardworking families. I look forward to working with you to help all Manitobans get ahead.” As seen in Figure 8, Scheer took a different approach from Bernier. Instead of presenting various polls or surveys of what “the people” wanted, Scheer shared stories of the people he met on the campaign, who told him about certain topics like unaffordability and higher cost of living prices. Scheer raised the high cost of living, a topic most Canadians can agree on, and brought it to the centre of his campaign. Despite tweeting “Canadians” 58 times, Scheer does not refer to the will of the people as he justified certain policies such as lowering taxes. His platform did not prove that he is people centric. It is broad and not necessarily populist, since affordability is a common theme among political parties of all stripes.

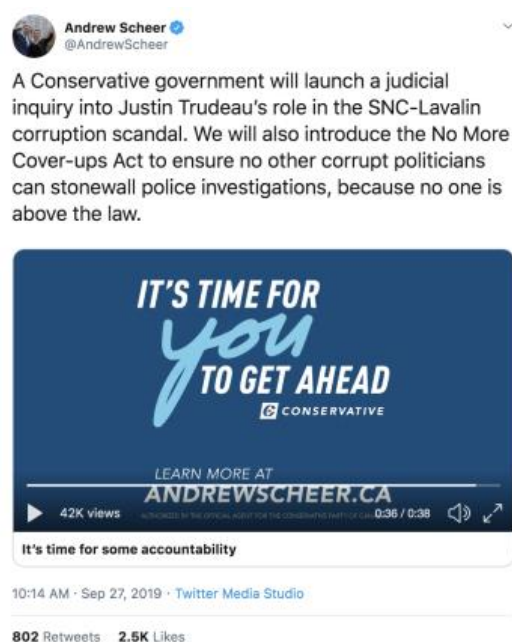
### **Figure 8**



**Source: Twitter**

Moving on to the third theme regarding the elite, I looked at whether Scheer mentioned a type of elite, whether it was a person or an organization. I expected Scheer would focus on Trudeau and his involvement with the SNC-Lavalin case, and would use words like “corrupt”. He did five times when speaking about the SNC-Lavalin case, but in no other circumstance did he do so. In Figure 9, there is a series of Scheer’s tweets criticizing Trudeau for his role in the SNC-Lavalin case, as well as Trudeau increasing taxes. Scheer grouped the Liberals with the NDP when criticizing them. Scheer tweeted over 10 times how a “Trudeau-NDP coalition” would be bad for Canadians.

**Figure 9**



(Continued on next page) Source: Twitter



**Andrew Scheer** ✓  
@AndrewScheer

Under Justin Trudeau, life has gotten even more expensive. It will only get worse with a Trudeau-NDP coalition. The choice is clear: A Conservative majority government that will put more money back in your pockets. Speaking in North York – WATCH LIVE: [facebook.com/AndrewScheerMP...](https://facebook.com/AndrewScheerMP...)

11:08 AM · Oct 19, 2019 · TweetDeck

572 Retweets 1.9K Likes

**Source: Twitter**



**Andrew Scheer** ✓  
@AndrewScheer

Justin Trudeau promised to cut taxes for Canadians, but then he raised taxes on over 80% of middle-class families. Meanwhile, Trudeau's carbon tax will increase the cost of everything, including groceries, gasoline, and home heating. (1/2)



4:27 PM · Sep 29, 2019 · TweetDeck

524 Retweets 1.3K Likes

Scheer brought Trudeau's scandals to the forefront by criticizing his involvement with the SNC-Lavalin case. But he did not make it seem Trudeau was out of touch with "the people" because he is an elite and does not understand the grievances of "the people". I found two examples in Figure 10, where Scheer said he understood the people's grievances. In one instance he said: "Conservatives will champion Canadian energy sector workers" and when responding to Trudeau's top advisor's tweet, Scheer criticized the Liberals by saying: "Liberals say they're for the middle class and those working hard to join it. Except if you wear high-vis work gear and put in a hard day's work. Then they call you a racist."

**Figure 10**

**Source: Twitter**

I was expecting both Bernier and Scheer, but more specifically Scheer, to use the western alienation narrative. Scheer is an MP from Saskatchewan and an advocate for the oil and gas industry, which has become increasingly volatile in the last several years. I was expecting Scheer to use this narrative of this largely excluded population being part of “the people”. Scheer could have emphasized his empathy and understanding of people working in the western provinces, especially the oil and gas sector workers, who often feel misrepresented and insecure, with job security diminishing every year. Overall, by examining and analyzing Scheer’s tweets, I cannot define him as a populist since he does not prove he sees society to be ultimately separated into two groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”. (Mudde, 2004, p.543) It just so happened that his adversary was accused of corruption at the time, but Scheer never used this in the context of Trudeau not understanding the grievances of “the people”. Scheer also did not prove that he has a

cult of personality as we did not learn much about him. So, I can conclude that Scheer, is in fact, not a populist.

### **Jagmeet Singh's Tweets**

As with Bernier and Scheer, I searched for Singh's cult of personality or charismatic leadership by analyzing his tweets. I went through his 209 tweets during the election campaign. At the time of writing in mid-March 2020, Singh has 282,500 Twitter followers. I was interested in analyzing Singh's tweets for evidence of populism because I wanted to test the theory that populists can be found anywhere along the political spectrum. The NDP has populist roots, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation established by Tommy Douglas in the 1930s and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) merged together to create the NDP in 1961. Singh was elected leader of the NDP in 2017. Singh appeals to a younger audience. Besides the usual campaigning on Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat, Singh is the only federal party leader to be on another social media platform, the video-sharing application called TikTok.

So far, the party leaders have offered a glimpse into their personal lives by sharing a few pictures of their family. Singh does the same as can be seen in Figure 11, he tweeted pictures of his parents, his wife, and even shared one of his recipes, a Punjabi take on Poutine. Like Scheer tweeting about his father working as a librarian, Singh tweeted about his parents being farmers before leaving Punjab and coming to Canada, which is why the International Plowing Match is "always extra special" for him.

**Figure 11**

**Jagmeet Singh** @theJagmeetSingh

My family has been through a lot over the years. Their resilience has inspired me beyond words. So having my mom & dad drop by during a busy day of campaigning was a special moment I'll never forget. #elxn43



6:14 PM · Oct 15, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

485 Retweets 9.2K Likes

**Jagmeet Singh** @theJagmeetSingh

The International Plowing Match is such a uniquely fun event – you get to jump on wagons & tractors while showing appreciation for Ontario's farm families.

Also, fun fact: My parents were farmers before leaving Punjab – so the #IPM2019 is always extra special for me. #elxn43



6:42 PM · Sep 17, 2019 · Twitter Web App

62 Retweets 342 Likes

**Jagmeet Singh** @theJagmeetSingh

Thanksgiving is a time for family, good food & one more day of early voting.

So I figured this is a good time to showcase one of my favourite meals to cook when the fam gets together.

Punjabi Poutine! It's like Punjabi & Quebec styles merging 🍷

Happy Thanksgiving!



10:48 AM · Oct 14, 2019 · Twitter Media Studio

1.1K Retweets 8.1K Likes

**Source: Twitter**

Singh was the only party leader so far that has showed parts of his personality and has opened up enough to make jokes, which usually humanizes politicians and makes them relatable to “the people”. Figure 12 shows two examples of Singh’s sense of humour. For example, when Singh voted with his wife on October 13, he tweeted: “Gurkiran and I just voted early in Burnaby South- she’s not telling me for who tho”. Singh used the most emojis in his tweets, an indication

he was speaking to a younger audience. Singh also did the usual campaign promotion, like Bernier and Scheer, sharing where he was going to be that day. He also shared if a newspaper or magazine published something about him or the NPD. We, however, did not get to learn more about Singh through his tweets. Like the other party leaders, Singh has an impressive background, he has a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Western Ontario, as well as a Bachelor of Laws degree from York University's Osgoode Hall Law School. He was a criminal defence lawyer for many years before entering politics. He did not share any of this via Twitter.

### **Figure 12**



### **Source: Twitter**

Like the two other party leaders we have seen so far, Singh also appeared to be the one writing his own tweets since he published them in the first person. For example, on October 6, Singh tweeted: "I always say to people that Ed Broadbent is who I want to be when I grow up. Ed is a legendary champion for people who has been so supportive & I couldn't ask for a better mentor. So today we hung out at the Ottawa farmer's market at Lansdowne for some fresh goodies.

#elxn43” Singh was also the only party leader so far to use his name when he tweets. He even created a new hashtag, which combined his last name Singh with “uprising” which made for the “#UpRiSingh” hashtag. A tweet I found particularly interesting was one from September 20, that read: “I’m Jagmeet Singh and I approve this message.” This made me think of an American presidential campaign advertisement. Singh appeared to be assertive and confident in his convictions. Singh showed the most “quantitatively exaggerated and qualitatively extravagant public demonstration of praise” of himself. (Popan, 2015, p.iv)

With regards to the second theme, Singh is likely address the will of the people as he justifies certain policies. Singh tweeted several times that he is in it “for the working people”, a term that is quite populist. On numerous occasions, he tweeted the hashtag “#InItForYou”, meaning that he is working for “the people” and not for himself or the rich. Tweets I collected in Figure 13 show how Singh portrays his understanding of “the people’s” grievances by saying things like “I’m in this for working people”, “I choose workers” and “We don’t work for the powerful, we work for people- and that’s what you get with New Democrats.” Like Scheer, Singh recounted personal experiences he had and shared what policy improvements he would introduce if he were PM. For example, on September 28, Singh tweeted: “When I met Betty in Campbell River, her main concern wasn't the fact that she was living in a tent – it was her kids. She was worried about her kids. This is the face of the #HousingCrisis & it's why we'll build half a million units of affordable housing across Canada.” He attempts to show empathy for “the people” by highlighting one person’s experience that many people share and bringing it to the forefront by tweeting about it and detailing how he will improve “the people’s” situation. Another good example is a tweet from September 26, that reads: “Had a pretty incredible stop in Courtenay today – thank you all for the energy, the love and the courage to share your stories. People here and

across Canada are ready for a government that's in it for people – not the rich and powerful. Let's keep this going! #elxn43” Singh distanced himself from other politicians, who he describes as those who are in it for “the rich and powerful”, by identifying and aligning himself with “the people”. He brought many subjects of interest to “the people” to the forefront, including climate change, the housing crisis, pharmacare and dental care when he tweeted. Through his tweets Singh demonstrated politics should be an expression of the general will of the people.

**Figure 13**

**Jagmeet Singh** @theJagmeetSingh

If you're a millionaire or powerful corporate insider – you know the Liberals & Conservatives are ready to fight for you.

New Democrats are different – we're in it for everyday people who deserve a government that actually works for them. That's what this #elxn2019 is all about.

**Jagmeet Singh** @theJagmeetSingh

I'm in this for working people.

For families that don't have access to offshore tax havens.

For moms & dads caring for their kids & ageing parents.

Justin Trudeau has chosen to protect the ultra-rich. Today in Montreal I made it clear: I choose workers. #CUPE2019 #elxn43

**Jagmeet Singh** @theJagmeetSingh

People in #OttawaCentre know very well that 4 years of a Trudeau Liberal government haven't made life any easier, while things for the ultra-rich are better than ever.

We don't work for the powerful, we work for people – and that's what you get with New Democrats. #elxn43

Emilie Taman and Stéphanie Mercier

7:54 PM · Sep 14, 2019 · Twitter Web App

66 Retweets 305 Likes

1:52 PM · Oct 9, 2019 · Twitter Web App

393 Retweets 2.3K Likes

Source: Twitter

With regards to the third theme, the whole brand and ethos of the NDP is that they are the anti-elite party since they are a progressive left-wing social democratic party who have populist roots. Figure 14 shows Singh tweeting about Trudeau and Scheer, who he says both work for the rich. An example is when Singh tweeted: “On this final day of campaigning, I want to make it clear- while Liberals and Conservatives continue to choose those at the very top, the ultra-rich and the big polluters, I choose you.” He juxtaposes the “people’s” grievances such as unaffordability, the climate crisis and the lack of a federal pharmacare and dental care, with predictions of what Trudeau or Scheer would do in power. Singh predicted their policies would not be “an expression of the general will of the people.” (Mudde, 2004, p.543). He tweeted the word “rich” over 15 times to prove the Liberals and Conservatives work only for the rich whereas the NDP would work for all Canadians. Like Scheer, Singh never said the word “elite” in his tweets, but unlike Scheer, Singh never used the word “corrupt” when speaking about Trudeau. However, Singh made it clear that Trudeau does not have “the people’s” best interest at heart and that his politics are not an expression of the people’s general will.

**Figure 14**

Source: Twitter

Overall, Singh is indeed a populist since he proved that he considers society to be separated into two “homogenous and antagonistic groups”, the pure working hard Canadians and those working for the ultra-rich elite. (Mudde, 2004, p.543) He proposed policies which he described as an expression of the will of the people such as universal pharmacare, dental care, climate change policies etc. His tweets showed more cult of personality characteristics than the other leaders. So, I would confirm Singh is a populist. I did not expect Singh would meet the definition of a populist. That he does confirms that populism is found along the political spectrum.

### **Justin Trudeau’s Tweets**

Trudeau had the most tweets during the time period analyzed, with a total of 351 tweets and he also had the most Twitter followers in mid-March 2020 at 4.7 million followers. The first theme I explored is Trudeau’s cult of personality or charismatic persona through his tweets. In

2015, Trudeau was elected in large part thanks to his personal brand and public image. Although he seemed young and fairly inexperienced, he seemed to be close to “the people” because his ideas were seen by many as refreshing yet familiar at the same time, especially taking in mind his late father’s legacy. His father, Pierre Trudeau, was the leader of the Liberal Party from 1968 until 1984 and was Canada’s third-longest serving Prime Minister for 15 years. During the 2019 election campaign, Trudeau tweeted many pictures of himself with his wife and children as can be seen in Figure 15. His kids would often campaign with him and he would tweet pictures of them meeting people. In Figure 15, Trudeau mentioned that his kids go to public school and that he was a former teacher. This indicated he was one of “the people” because he did not send his children to private school like Scheer did with his kids. Like the other federal party leaders, Trudeau shared his itinerary for the day. He made it seem that he was personally in charge of his Twitter account, even though he has a huge following with 4.7 million followers and surely has a team of people that manages his social media accounts.

### **Figure 15**



(Continued on next page) Source: Twitter



Source: Twitter

### Figure 16



Source: Twitter

As shown in Figure 16, Trudeau said he was “turning over” his Twitter account to his team for the evening making it seem like he wrote his other tweets. His Twitter biography even reads: “Account run by PM & staff”, an indication that Trudeau is heavily involved in the running of his social media account. Trudeau shared his itinerary with his followers during the campaign and he would often share pictures of himself and his family. He shared some personal anecdotes but for the most part, the audience did not learn much about his education or his past professional experiences.

Regarding the second theme concerning the “will of the people”, I analyzed Trudeau’s tweets and asked the following question: “*Does Trudeau refer to the will of the people when justifying certain policies?*” With some quantitative searches looking for certain words such as “hardworking Canadians”, Trudeau only mentioned that twice in all his tweets. In 73 tweets he used “we” as opposed to “I” in an attempt to identify with other Canadians. All four federal party leaders named people they met on the campaign trail and tweeted about their experiences. For example on October 14, Trudeau tweeted: “Why #ChooseForward? For people I met today who rely on the jobs we fought for with NAFTA & for people like Mellissa in this article. Our support for pediatric cancer research will help little ones like her daughter Megan, who’s bravely facing chemo.” Another tweet that Trudeau published on October 17 had a similar strategy: “Our Quebec team understands what matters most to people in Quebec, and shares your values and priorities. This team is strong, and will keep Quebecers at the heart of their decisions in government.” In this tweet, he reassured his followers how confident he is in himself and his team and how he understands the grievances of “the people”. This makes him appear confident and assertive.

### **Figure 17**

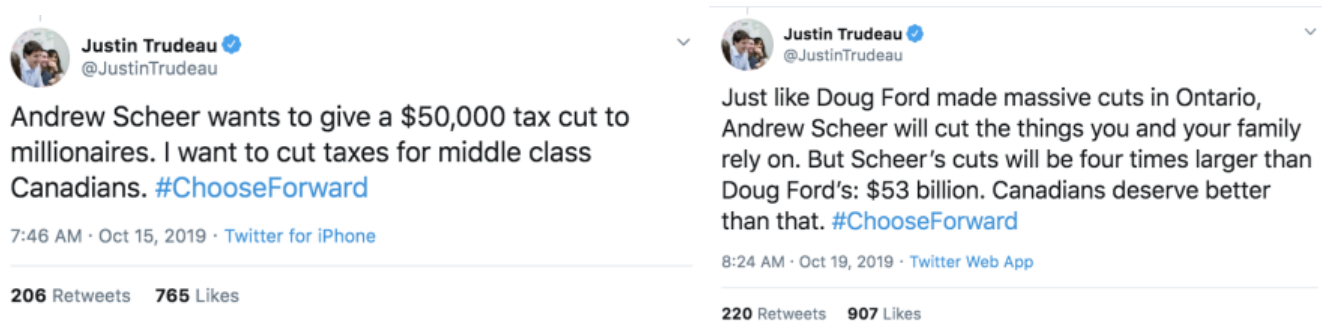


**Source: Twitter**

Trudeau tweeted several times “Make your voice heard”, as a tactic to get Canadians engaged in the election and voting process. A tweet I selected in Figure 17 shows the hashtag used by Trudeau, “#UpToYouth”. He likely created this hashtag to let young voters, in particular, know the Liberal Party was the best choice for them. Millennial voters (individuals born between 1980 and 2000) made up the biggest voting bloc in the 2019 federal election. More millennials were eligible to vote than baby boomers. (Dhaliwal, 2019). Trudeau focused on younger voters since he was successful with young voters in the 2015 federal election. Trudeau focused on personal interactions he had with people as well as coming across confident and understanding of “the people’s” grievances such as addressing climate change, universal pharmacare, etc. Trudeau tweeted “We’re going to” 16 times. This showed how he would be implementing a new policy based on people’s grievances. Trudeau indeed referred to the will of the people to justify certain policies.

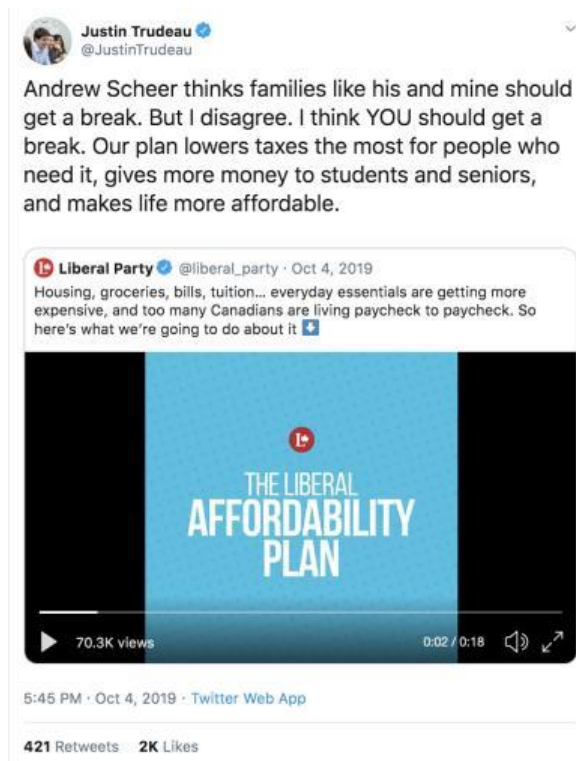
The third theme regarding elites is interesting. I did not expect Trudeau would create a divisive atmosphere by comparing “the people” versus the elites. Trudeau did not use the words “elite” or “rich”, but did tweet the word “millionaire” five times when referring to Scheer’s platform. He said Scheer was looking out for the very rich and will want to give a tax break to Canadian millionaires. This is similar to Singh’s strategy. As shown in Figure 18, Trudeau took the opportunity to criticize his opponent Scheer but did so by including all Conservatives in general. For example, he grouped Scheer with Ontario’s Doug Ford. Trudeau grouped provincial and federal Conservatives together as a way to warn Canadians of Scheer implementing similar policies to Ford’s social services and education cuts.

## **Figure 18**



### **Source: Twitter**

Trudeau took the opportunity to criticize Scheer over 25 times in a total of 351 tweets. He even mentioned former PM Harper's name seven times, reminding Canadians to not go "backwards" as he warned Canadians of going back "to the Harper years". Trudeau tweeted on October 11: "On October 21, Canadians have a choice to make. Keep moving forward on the progress we've made, or go backwards to the Harper years." As expected, Trudeau does not seem to divide Canadians into two groups, "the pure people" and the "corrupt elite". (Mudde, 2004, p.543) Trudeau definitely tried to push the narrative that Scheer and the Conservatives wanted to cut taxes for "millionaires" and the "wealthiest 1%" and that they would cut social services for Canadians. Never was the narrative surrounding society ultimately separated into two "homogenous and antagonistic groups". (Mudde, 2004, p.543) A tweet I found particularly interesting, found in Figure 19, is Trudeau trying to prove he is aware of his own privilege by saying "Andrew Scheer thinks families like his and mine should get a break. But I disagree." He acknowledged his own family's privilege and turned it into a positive by acknowledging it and saying how he would stand up for "you", meaning "the people", which he defined as "people who need it [...] students and seniors".

**Figure 19**

Trudeau's tweets left the impression he has somewhat of a cult of personality since he would share his itinerary, and post pictures of him and his family. He also included his children in his campaigning activities, which makes him seem more approachable and down to earth, as opposed to an out-of-touch politician. Trudeau also seemed to share that he understood "the people's" grievances and addressed certain policies such as addressing climate change,

**Source: Twitter**

introducing the Canada Child Benefit, lowering taxes for the middle class, etc. I would not define Trudeau as a populist by looking at his tweets. However, he does fit the mold of a populist leader in terms of charisma and cult of personality. He also seems to understand "the people's" grievances by focusing on a pretty vague term, the middle class, which most Canadians can identify themselves as. But overall, he does not prove that he sees society as two separate groups. Because of this last point, he cannot be defined as a populist. Although he criticized Scheer and made him seem like he's in it only for the richest 1%, Trudeau did not describe Scheer or the Conservatives as corrupt elite.

### **What The Tweets Tell Us**

The leaders each adopted a similar writing style. Each had simple and short tweets. All wrote their tweets in English and French. The party leaders also took on similar strategies in terms of

campaigning. They all shared their campaign itinerary, the city they would be in that day and what they were going to do (a meet-and-greet or an announcement). They also shared pictures of themselves and their families on the campaign trail. Trudeau did this the most and managed to share more of his personality. Singh was a close second. Bernier and Scheer were the least personable in terms of sharing a glimpse into their personal lives. Bernier and Scheer focused on the policies they wanted to implement rather than their personal lives. They all, however, were adept at selling themselves. All shared interviews or press they had received on social media. All spoke about out against one another, as can be seen in Table 1. Scheer spoke out against Trudeau the most, with a record number of 79 tweets directed against Trudeau. Bernier is the one who spoke against Scheer the most, with 35 tweets criticizing him. No one mentioned the PPC by name. Singh is the only person who named Bernier. On September 16, Singh tweeted: “I will be at the Leader's debates – and I will strongly oppose any hatred expressed on that stage. We still think giving Maxime Bernier a national platform to spread hate and division in our country is wrong. #elxn43” Scheer never mentioned Bernier’s name nor the PPC in his tweets. However, the day before the election, he tweeted the following: “Beauce knows that there's only one candidate who is working to help you get ahead; that candidate is Richard Lehoux! Amazing to meet with everyone there this yesterday afternoon.” Scheer spoke about Beauce (Bernier’s riding) and promoted the Conservative candidate there to help prevent Bernier from winning his seat.

Canadian politics is quite bland, especially compared to American politics. Singh had the catchiest comebacks to his opponents. On October 8, Singh tweeted: “You don't have to choose between Mr. Delay (@JustinTrudeau) & Mr. Deny (@AndrewScheer). It's time to start fighting the climate crisis like we want to win by taking on the largest polluters & creating 300,000 new jobs in the clean energy economy of the future. #CanadaDebates2019.” Finding the balance

between a real criticism and having an element of humour is not an easy task. In this particular tweet, he was not very aggressive. Yet he succeeded in making the point that Trudeau and Scheer were not up for the job. Scheer often used the hashtag “#notasadvertised” when speaking about Trudeau. The hashtag alluded to the scandals, like the SNC-Lavalin case and the blackface scandal, that disappointed Canadians. Scheer used the “#notasadvertised” hashtag to put his point across that Trudeau was not authentic.

**Table 1 - Criticisms of Other Party Leaders**

<b>Bernier</b>	<b>Scheer</b>	<b>Singh</b>	<b>Trudeau</b>
Trudeau 19x	Trudeau 79x	Trudeau 29x	Scheer 26x
Liberal 14x	Liberal 3x	Liberal 24x	Conservative 29x
Scheer 35x	Bernier 0x	Scheer 3x	Singh 1x
Conservative 17x	PPC 0x	Conservative 9x	NDP 1x
Singh 4x	Singh 0x	Bernier 1x	Bernier 0x
NDP 1x	NDP 17x	PPC 0x	PPC 0x

**Source: Twitter**

I divided each leader’s tweets into three main categories to do a small quantitative analysis: cult of personality, will of the people and critique of elites. Some tweets did not fit in any category. Table 2 shows how often Bernier, Scheer, Singh and Trudeau’s tweets fell into the three main categories. The original tweets can be found in Appendix 1. I colour-coded the leaders’ tweets in blue if the leader shared a personal anecdote, a picture of themselves, their family or their itinerary. Those highlighted in green emphasized whether a party leader justified certain policies based on the will of the people, either through personal interactions or through surveys or polls. Lastly, those in red showed whether they critiqued their political opponents, international institutions or

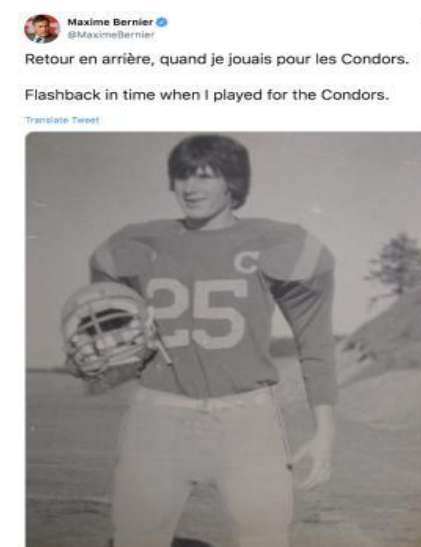
others who did not have “the people’s” best intentions at heart. By color-coordinating the tweets into the three populist categories, I was then able to count each leader’s tweets per category.

**Table 2 - Quantitative Analysis**

<b>Populist characteristics/ Party Leader</b>	<b>Bernier</b> (273 tweets)	<b>Scheer</b> (267 tweets)	<b>Singh</b> (209 tweets)	<b>Trudeau</b> (351 tweets)
<b>Cult of personality</b>	87 tweets 31.87%	126 tweets 47.19%	95 tweets 45.45%	104 tweets 29.63%
<b>Will of the people</b>	32 tweets 11.73%	60 tweets 22.48%	71 tweets 33.97%	129 tweets 36.75%
<b>Criticizing elites</b>	107 elites 39.19%	54 tweets 20.23%	33 tweets 15.79%	58 tweets 16.52%

**Source: Twitter**

Scheer tweeted the most in the “cult of personality” category. He mostly tweeted about the press conferences he was going to be attending that day. He also shared a lot of details on his campaign schedule and itinerary. All the party leaders showed how personable they were to their followers and the media. Figure 20 shows Trudeau and Scheer speaking to people at a local Tim Hortons. The symbolism of having a coffee and speaking to “the people” is quite strong. Singh and Bernier took similar approaches. They would take pictures of themselves speaking to people in various cities they toured. I included a picture Singh tweeted during the campaign of him shaking a young boy’s hand. The symbolism is quite strong of him working for future generations. I also included a picture of Bernier, one that he tweeted during the campaign of him as a young student playing football. All the pictures the leaders tweeted are examples of how they tried to seem personable and come across as charismatic in their own ways.

**Figure 20**

With regards to the second theme, out of all the party leaders Trudeau is the one who justified certain policies the most since they aligned with the will of the people. Surprisingly all four party leaders took a similar strategy by tweeting about personal interactions they had with people they met on the campaign trail and justified this person's experience for bringing forward a certain policy. For example, Scheer tweeted on September 15: "Life is getting more expensive for people like Reed and Gretchen, who I met with this morning in Surrey. That's why I was so proud to announce our Universal Tax Cut that will leave hundreds of dollars more in your pockets. Because it's time for you to get ahead!" This strategy of justifying a certain policy is similar to a

tweet by Singh. On September 18 he tweeted: “For people like Melodie in Sudbury, our universal dental care plan will not only make life more affordable – it'll mean she can actually get the critical dental work done that she needs for her health. In this election, we're in it for Melodie.” Singh decided to justify his policies not by criticizing the other opponents or the elite, but by justifying certain policies because politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. Bernier also justified certain policies based on personal interactions, polls and surveys, but not as often as the three other leaders.

Unsurprisingly, Bernier is the leader who criticized his adversaries and the elite the most in his tweets. Singh is the one who criticized his opponents the least. The SNC-Lavalin case may have encouraged Bernier and Scheer to accuse Trudeau of corruption frequently. Both Bernier and Singh clearly expressed the view that the current establishment was not representative of all Canadians and that it did not represent the expression of the general will of the people. In order to prove this point, Bernier decided to criticize his opponents and the corrupt elite in general. On numerous occasions, he said other political parties were “morally and intellectually corrupt”. Bernier explicitly said he and the PPC represent the “MAJORITY of Canadians” (tweet from September 20). Bernier used the strategy to push the narrative that the Liberals and Conservatives were the same and that the PPC was the only unique political party. Singh expressed that both the Liberals and Conservatives were out of touch with the real working-people and only the NDP represented all Canadians. He often tweeted “InItForYou” or that he was working for “the people” and protecting people’s rights. The main point of Mudde’s (2004, p.543) definition is that populists believe society is divided into two separate “homogenous and antagonistic groups” and that politics “should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people”. Bernier and Singh are the only two party leaders who proved they concurred with this assessment. This important point

proves that Bernier and Singh are populists. A quantitative analysis might not be the most accurate way to measure populism, however. Although Trudeau tweeted more times that showed he had a cult of personality and that certain policies put forward were justified because “the people” wanted it, compared to Bernier and Singh, Trudeau never saw society ultimately divided into two “homogenous and antagonistic groups” which is at the core of populism. (Mudde, 2004, p.543) As we saw in Canadian history with the farmers being juxtaposed to the bankers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Trudeau and Scheer never alluded to the fact that two groups existed where one represented “the pure people” whereas the other was “the corrupt elite”. (Mudde, 2004, p.543)

For a future analysis, I would consider the assistance of an electronic analysis software. It would have been interesting to include Green Party leader Elizabeth May and Bloc Québécois leader Yves-François Blanchet’s tweets in the analysis, as it would have made for a full analysis of all six federal party leaders. I would also add for future projects that French tweets also be included to determine if there is a discrepancy between English and French tweets. The analysis does confirm that measuring populism is difficult. Perhaps three themes are not enough to measure populism and perhaps different measures would be necessary to prove that certain themes are more significant than others. Most politicians require having a cult of leader personality, this does not necessarily make them populist. Populist leaders are ultimately charismatic and personable because they are close to “the people” and should understand their grievances. They should not put on a show to pretend they understand what “the people” are going through. Measuring charismatic leadership or having a cult of personality is challenging because, at the end of the day, it is “the people” who decide if they like the candidate or not largely based on personal reasons, not if they often tweeted a picture of themselves or their kids. Some people also do not want to get to know politicians, they would rather hear about their policies and understand what the politicians

would offer them. Justifying certain policies because they represent the will of the people is not necessarily populist either, usually politicians go into politics to help “the people”. But since so many past governments have looked inward and have forgotten the essence of working for “the people”, populists use this narrative to ensure the confidence of the voters. Nonetheless, it was fascinating to measure that Bernier was the one who criticized his opponents the most, Trudeau kept in mind the will of the people the most and Scheer tweeted the most about his itinerary, press conferences and news articles.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this MRP was to determine whether Maxime Bernier or any other federal party leader could be defined as a populist by simply reading their tweets. I analyzed the tweets of Maxime Bernier, Andrew Scheer, Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau during the election campaign using a detailed coding scheme. I believe my coding scheme, which analyzed over 1000 tweets, achieved its goal and could be applied to any populist leaders around the world. The research question I attempted to answer was: “*Is Maxime Bernier a populist?*” It turned out that the analysis proved that not only Maxime Bernier could be defined as a populist, but also Jagmeet Singh. This confirmed the theory that populists can be either right or left-wing politicians. Canada’s history of populism at both provincial and federal levels offers an explanation as to why the same continues to exist today and that it is here to stay. The literature review provided two main takeaways. The first is that populism can be found anywhere along the political spectrum, which in turn, makes it difficult to identify populism. The second is that populism is difficult to measure because it is often misdefined by the media or other politicians. The stigma attached to the term populism prevents people from actually knowing what it is. Bernier welcomed the term and self-identified himself as

a populist. However, because of the negative connotation behind the term, I doubt Singh would identify himself as a populist.

The initial reasoning behind choosing populism as the choice of topic for this MRP was to highlight the dangers of far-right wing populism around the world including authoritarianism, xenophobia and nativism. I was interested to determine whether Canada could be immune to these trends and if the notion of “Canadian exceptionalism” is true. I started writing my MRP before the 2019 election and although the polls did not predict the PPC to sweep several seats in Parliament, I did not predict Bernier losing his seat after being an MP in his riding for 13 years. In a recent interview with the National Post over any regrets Bernier had about the election campaign, Bernier admitted he regretted writing a particular tweet. He tweeted on September 2: “@GretaThunberg is clearly mentally unstable. Not only autistic, but obsessive-compulsive, eating disorder, depression and lethargy, and she lives in a constant state of fear.” (Dawson, 2019) Since this was right before the official campaign period, it was not included in the tweets analyzed in this MRP. I thought it was still important to include since it shows how important social media is for politicians, particularly populists in this technologically advanced day and age.

Canada’s Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Relations acknowledged the threat of populism in Canada last year. They made a recommendation to “continue to work to strengthen democracy, its democratic institutions and to ensure that its system of governance is resilient to the challenges of today”. (Kolga, 2019) Bernier says he is prepping for his next election campaign, an eventuality in a minority government situation. He has also created a YouTube channel, where every week he will invite guests to speak and debate about current affairs. I cannot help but wonder whether the PPC and Bernier failed because there is no room for a far-right populist movement in Canada at the federal level and/or whether Bernier himself is not the right

politician to lead this movement forward. Canada has always and will always continue to be exposed to right and left-wing populist leaders at both the provincial and federal levels. This is why it is important that we learn how to identify and recognize populists online.

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## **Appendix 1**

Please find the open link to access all the tweets of Bernier, Scheer, Singh and Trudeau: (English tweets, no retweets or replies from September 11 to October 21)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vEH--XAvO6M2Ukcrgp-2Nzy3kOPv0FRN9vtwySTCFBk/edit?usp=sharing>