

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ROCH KABORÉ'S 2020 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN RALLY DISCOURSES IN BURKINA FASO

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Abstract: This paper examines the 2020 electoral campaign discourses delivered by the MPP candidate of the Mouvement le Peuple et Progrès (MPP), Roch Marc Christian Kaboré (RMCK). It attempts to decipher the discursive moves used by the party's leaders to subtly influence the voters' choices towards their interests. Employing Van Dijk (2006) Approach and a mixed-method research design, this critical discourse analysis investigates the social, cognitive, and discursive dimensions of the manipulative moves encoded in three (3) rally speeches delivered by RMCK. The findings reveal that RMCK's social environment associated with his use of verbal and non-verbal means of manipulation set the tone for power abuse and cognitive mind control over the audiences. This discursive strategy resulted in the outgoing candidate's re-election.

Keywords: Political Discourse, Election, Manipulation, Cognitive Mind Control

UNE ANALYSE CRITIQUE DES DISCOURS PRONONCÉS LORS DES MEETINGS DE CAMPAGNE ELECTORALE DE ROCH KABORE EN 2020 AU BURKINA FASO

Résumé : Cet article examine les discours de campagne électorale de 2020 prononcés par le candidat du Mouvement pour le Peuple et le Progrès (MPP), Roch Marc Christian Kaboré (RMCK), au Burkina Faso. Il s'attelle à décrypter les stratagèmes discursifs utilisés par les dirigeants du parti pour influencer subtilement les choix des électeurs dans leur propre intérêt. En s'appuyant sur l'approche de Van Dijk (2006) et d'une méthodologie mixte, cette analyse critique du discours explore les dimensions sociales, cognitives et discursives des stratagèmes manipulateurs codés dans trois (3) discours de meeting prononcé par RMCK. Les résultats révèlent que l'environnement social de RMCK, associé à son utilisation de schémas de manipulation verbaux et non verbaux, a donné le ton à une dynamique de domination et de contrôle cognitif sur le public. Cette stratégie discursive a conduit à la réélection du candidat sortant.

Mots-clés : Discours politique, élections, manipulation, contrôle cognitif de l'esprit

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that every national aspires to social and economic welfare which is contingent on leadership quality and an intelligible use of language to align the stakeholders. This denotes the significant role of language in fostering the improvement of the vital aspects of society. When narrowed to politics specifically, the use of language appears to serve selfish interests from various scholars' perspectives. In this line, Chilton (2004) views "political discourse in terms of some social group or elite exploiting, controlling or distorting language in order to preserve its own position" (p.198). While Bayram (2010) holds it responsible for preparing, accompanying, influencing and unfolding every political action. In the same vein, Kientega (2025) corroborates that "politicians use language in specific ways to achieve ends" (p.1); insinuating that they use the language in a subtle manner to meet their interests. Such a malicious use of language is regarded by Van Dijk (2006) as manipulation, which simply put, refers to politicians making the lay people trust and enact in their interest to the detriment of the latter's own interests.

This political approach featuring political leaders subtly seeking electors' support to gain power for their opaque interest is prevalent in many countries around the world. These countries include Burkina Faso, a West African country where the 'Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès' (MPP) led by Roch Marc Christian Kabore (RMCK) was running for second presidential term after a controversial first one in 2020. As a matter of fact, prior to the election in question, the Burkinabè citizens had experienced many political upheavals and military leadership embedded with several coups from 1966 to 2014, which led to the desire for peaceful power alternation among the populace. However, the 2020 electoral context and its paradoxical outcome raise suspicion of an influential use of language by the protagonists. RMCK's regime encountered security issues and accusations of bad governance during his first term. Despite this situation he was enthusiastically re-elected in 2020. His re-election was followed by popular demonstrations which led to his eviction two years later portraying disillusionment among the populace (Kientega, 2025).

Such an incongruence between the support for the MPP candidate and the demonstrations that followed combined with the existing research gap regarding the campaign discourse of a political party that has already exercised power constitutes the incentives for this study. In other words, the situation requires a closer look at the influential elements in the electoral campaign discourse by leaders of the party. This study aims to investigate three (3) electoral campaign rally discourses delivered in 2020 by RMCK to determine the influence of the campaign discourses in his 2020 re-election. More specifically, the study strives to decipher the discursive strategies used by the MPP during the 2020 electoral campaign on the one hand and reveal their manipulative nature on the other hand. To meet such a purpose this Critical Discourse Analysis study endeavours to answer the research questions below through Van Dijk's (2006) Socio cognitive approach: what are the discursive moves used by the MPP during 2020 electoral campaign? To what extent did these discursive moves influence the outcome of the 2020 election? To address these questions, we formulate the following hypotheses: The MPP used several discursive moves during the 2020 electoral campaign. The discursive moves used influenced the outcome of the 2020 election.

1. Theoretical Perspectives and Literature Review

1.1 Theoretical perspective

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a perspective of cross-disciplinary endeavour to discourse studies focusing on the discursive production and reproduction of power abuse since its inception according to Chilton (2005). While Wodak (2004) traces its official advent back to “the launch of Van Dijk’s journal *Discourse and Society* as well as the publication of several books” (p.303), (...) Van Dijk (1995) admits that “CDA has become the general label for a special approach to the study of text and talk, emerging from critical linguistics, critical semiotics and in general from a socio-politically conscious and oppositional way of investigating language, discourse and communication” (p1). These different focuses are significant interest to the proponents of CDA fostering recourse to a diversity of frameworks aligning with its interdisciplinary nature.(...) In this line, Van Dijk (2015) postulates that CDA is not a specific direction and consequently does not have a unitary framework. This led to the development of several frameworks by a significant number of prominent scholars including Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun Van Dijk, to name but a few. Due to space limitation, this study only elaborates on Van Dijk (2006)’s triangulated framework which particularly postulates that cognition mediates between discourse and society. This framework is operationalized in the subsection below since it is the one utilized in this study.

-Van Dijk’s (2006) triangulated approach to manipulation

This framework offers a triangulated approach to manipulation which is distinguished from persuasion from the outset. For Van Dijk (2006) manipulation contrasts with persuasion since he regards the former as “a communicative and interactional practice, in which a manipulator exercises control over other people, usually against their will or against their best interests”, (p.360.) He associates manipulation with a form of illegitimate mind control, dominance and power abuse using discourse where the “recipient is assigned a passive role” and even appear as “victim of manipulation” (Van Dijk, 2006, p.361), while persuasion is considered legitimate because it provides the listener with room for choice to believe or not. Van Dijk (2006) further clarifies that manipulation is in the interest of the manipulator to the detriment of the fully conscious will and interests of ordinary people.

Practically, Van Dijk (2006) addresses manipulation from a three-dimensional perspective, featuring manipulations as social power abuse, cognitive mind control and discursive interaction. (...)

1.2 Literature Review

-The state of research on Manipulation

Research shows that manipulation is one of the salient notions that sparks the interests of several scholars in the field of CDA. Van Dijk (2006) states in this sense that similarly to other essential concepts in CDA due to their implications in “discursive power abuse” (p.359), manipulation needs a particular consideration. This triggered the commitment of a significant number of scholars to address the concept using various theoretical and conceptual perspectives that often overlap, contrast or complement one another to some extent. This study does not cover all the above-mentioned perspectives for length constraints. As mentioned earlier in this study, Van Dijk (2006) provides a ‘triangulated’ approach to manipulation building on the three dimensions of analysis that are the social, the cognitive and the discursive one. The scholar explored the operations of

manipulation at the three levels of analysis and found that in 2003, the former British prime minister, Tony Blair manipulated the British representatives socially, cognitively and discursively to gain their approval to join the then US-led war in Iraq.

Recent research in various parts of the world exhibits different strategies of illegitimate mind control. This applies to election campaign rally discourse where discursive devices such as positive self-presentation and negative other presentations are employed by candidates to gear the voters' actions in their interests (Sr Ojha, 2022). He got to these findings using Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach to investigate the presidential election rally discourses in the USA. whereas, focusing on the concept of nationalism and religious discourse, Nawaz *et al.* (2024) demonstrates that discourses are maliciously tailored to convey ideologies maintain power or aiming at influencing the Pakistani populace's actions and mindset using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional framework.

Researchers across Africa explored manipulation with various focuses contingent to their specific interests. One of these endeavours highlights the core tenets and goals of CDA to equip the practitioners for more scientific accuracy in the field. Amoussou and Allagbe (2018) strives to explicit the main approaches and methodological assets of CDA. Based on these scientific tools, Krisagbedo *et al.* (2021) finds out the malicious use of the ideological square to gain political dominance and highlights the significance of CDA in providing for the populace's need "need for the populace to develop critical thinking that would predispose them to probe beneath the veil of hidden agenda implicit in political communication", (p.843). Allagbe *et al.* (2025) reveal the contribution of a combination speech acts and word order lexicon and rhetorics in cognitive mind control, whereas Adulkadir (2023) sheds light on how the deployment of ideology imbedded in individuals or groups induce domination and supremacy through linguistic features. As it can be inferred from these studies, manipulation involves a variety of determinant means grounded in language which are non-exhaustively covered depending on the framework employed.

Recent research in the Burkinabè context shows several facets of social inequality that pave the way for effective manipulation. While Kambou and Traore (2020) found that the privileged social status and access to media fostered the manipulation of the ordinary people in the 2014 popular uprising in Burkina Faso by the leaders (...), Sanou (2022) (...) highlights both the MPP and CDP's use of ideological strategies to influence the worldview of the populace. Building on these studies, Kientega (2025) investigated the MPP and CDP¹ 2020 rally speeches utilizing a combination of Van Dijk 2000 and 2006 to showcase the strategic use of the in-group versus out-group dichotomy to glorify the former and discredit the latter through discursive categories, thus controlling the mind of the voters.

2. Methodology

This section deals with the research design, the source of the data, the rational of the data, the data collection tools and procedures, the data analysis tools and procedures.

2.1 The research design

"Research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis" (Cresswell, 2009, p.1). Such research plans imply the deliberate nature of the research design choice usually based on the focus and objectives of the study and to some extent the 'philosophical

¹ CDP stands for Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès, a political party founded by former President Blaise Compaoré.

worldview' of the researcher. In this line, we resorted to a mixed method research design in this study because it allows to capture the width and breadth of speeches according to Aranda *et al.* (2021). Simply put, the combination of both methods will help quantify the discursive moves prior to their qualitative analysis.

2.3 Sources, population and Sampling procedure

This study uses secondary data, essentially rally speeches downloaded from the official YouTube Channel of 3TV, and the official Facebook page of the candidate, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. They are populated by the rally discourses delivered by the candidate of the MPP during the 2020 electoral campaign in Burkina Faso. We purposefully selected three (3) speeches out of the eight (8) collected. They include the announcement speech, the mid-campaign speech and the final speech delivered by RMCK. (...) This population was purposefully selected to determine the discursive strategies used by the successful candidate. The incentive for choosing these rally discourse lies in the role of the political sphere as an excellent slot for authentic interaction between presidential election candidates and their audience. For Benoit (2007), political campaign discourse provides a determinant occasion for direct communication between the candidates and their audience. The grounds for selecting the announcement speeches reside in the framework they provide for the speaker's identity construction Cullen (2016). While the mid-campaign speech is potentially built on feedback of the past rallies and eventual adjustment, the final speech in this study is specifically held in the capital city entailing a large audience with a higher education rate. This purposeful sampling combined with the qualitative analysis might induce researcher bias despite our endeavour for analytical transparency.

Data collection tools and techniques

The data for this paper were collected from the authentic videos of the speeches. (...) Moreover, the speeches followed a non-verbatim transcription process representativity wise as suggested by Dubois *et al.* (1992). These data were translated into English using DeepL and adjusted with a significant consideration of the socio-cultural context from Hatim and Mason (1997) standpoints. Then, the relevant excerpts were extracted based on Van Dijk's (2006) approach to serve as unit of analysis. Additionally, we collected relevant screenshots from the videos to address the non-verbal features of manipulation.

-Data analysis procedure.

The data mentioned above were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively to explore the strategies used to manipulate the populace through power abuse and cognitive mind control from Van Dijk's (2006) standpoint. In this line, the discursive strategies were identified and quantified in a table following Van Dijk's (2006) micro level of the triangulated approach to manipulation prior to the qualitative analysis based on the three dimensions of analysis developed by the approach. These are the social, cognitive and discursive levels of analysis. The first level of analysis helped identify the potential manipulators and the manipulated entities through a closer the factors that define the power of groups and their members. The second considered the elements inducing cognitive mind control of the recipients such as context models, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies including images and symbols that are considered to affect the understanding of a discourse. While the third one is built on the quantified discursive moves that influence the mental models of the

participants as mentioned in the table below. These procedures helped showcase the discursive categories use by RMCK and the way they influenced the actions of the voters.

3. Results and Discussion

This section of the study showcases the findings and their discussion hereby addressing the research questions mentioned earlier in this study: What are the discursive strategies used by RMCK during the 2020 electoral campaign? To what extent did they influence the 2020 election outcome? Prior to the actual analysis of the results, a quantitative display of the discursive moves used in the selected speeches is provided.

3.1 The quantitative display of the discursive devices

Table 1: The discursive devices in the selected speeches.

Order	Discursive devices	RMCK announcement speech	RMCK Mid-campaign speech	RMCK final speech	Total (Number)	%
1	Actor description		1	1	2	3.03 %
2	Authority		1		1	1.52%
3	Burden	1	1	1	3	4.55%
4	Categorization		1		1	1.52%
5	Consensus	3	3	1	7	10.61%
6	Counterfactuals	1	1		2	3.03%
7	Disclaimers		1	1	2	3.03%
8	Empathy		1		1	1.52%
9	Fallacies	3	3		6	9.09%
10	History as a lesson	3	1		4	6.06%
11	Humanitarianism	2	1		3	4.55%
12	Hyperbole	1	2		3	4.55%
13	Implication	2	1		3	4.55%
14	Legality	1	1		2	3.03%
15	Metaphor	1	1		2	3.03%
16	National self-Glorification	1			1	1.52%
17	Negative other presentation	2		2	4	6.06%
18	Norm expression	2	1		3	3.03%
19	Openness		1		1	1.52%
20	Polarization	1	2	1	4	6.06%
21	Populism	3		1	4	6.06%
22	Positive Self-Presentation	2	1	1	4	6.06%
23	Victimization		2	1	3	3.03%
Total		29 (43.93%)	27(40.90%)	10(15.15%)	/66	100%

Source: Collected data, December 2024

The table above provides a quantified display of the discursive categories employed by RMCK in his quest for the presidency in Burkina Faso during the 2020 electoral campaign. The candidate used twenty-three (23) discursive devices sixty-six (66) times in total with different frequency of occurrence per speech and per category. More specifically, the frequency of occurrence per speech shows that the candidate utilized some of the detected categories twenty-nine (29) times (43.93%) in his announcement speech, Twenty-seven (27) times (40.90%) in his mid-campaign speech and ten (10) times (15.15%) in his

final speech. It appears from these data that the highest number of discursive moves was used in the announcement speech, followed by that of the mid-campaign speech and the final speech. These disparities in the frequency of discursive device use per speech with a chronological logic showcases RMCK's strategy for constructing his identity through good first impression in a manipulative manner. The data also highlights significant disparities in the frequency of occurrence per category. In this line, consensus appears to be the most frequent categories with 10.61% (7) of the occurrences, followed by fallacies with 9.09% (6) of the occurrences, while history as a lesson, negative other presentation, polarization, populism and positive self-presentation represent 6.06% (4) each. Burden, humanitarianism, hyperbole, implications, norm expressions and victimization appear in a lower position with 4.55% (3) each. With 3.03% (2) of occurrence, actors' description, counterfactuals, disclaimers, legality and metaphor rank slightly on top of the least frequent devices with 1.52% (1) of occurrence. They include authority, categorization, empathy, notional self-glorification and openness. The subsections below deal with detailed analysis of the three dimensions of manipulation in the lens of van Dijk's (2006) approach. The analysis excludes some of the least occurrent categories due to space constraints.

3.2 Manipulative nature of RMCK's strategies

-Social dimension

This level of analysis was conducted focusing on the social conditions for manipulation which entails a closer look at the social environments of the social groups. In this line, the study revealed that RMCK was identified as a member of the powerful group in opposition to the members of his audience. In other words, this level of analysis highlights the prestigious social, professional and political positions held by RMCK and his group. Examining his background, we notice that he enjoyed higher professional and political positions such as Managing Director of a Bank, Member of government, MP, president of the National Assembly and outgoing Head of State similarly to his close collaborators in the party to some extent. Moreover, the synchronic media coverage of his announcement speech by about 6 media including national and international ones implies significant access to scarce social resources, especially expedited access to media unlike the participants who are predominantly tradespeople, students, farmers, merchants, and unemployed people. The images below showcase RMCK's fancy positions in his social environment in contrast to those of the recipients.

Figure 1: The different social groups and their domination potentials



Source: Screenshots from the videos of the selected speeches December 2024

While in image 1 from the left, he literally enters the stadium in a luxurious car and was even driven over a given distance in the stadium before getting out, he is surrounded by bodyguards with two ballistic briefcases in image 2. Combining these aspects with the number and quality of the microphone in image 3 as well as his outstanding armchair at the VIP Stand of the stadium in image 4, obviously demonstrates his exclusive access to scarce social resources. This contrasts with the participants sitting on the concrete seats at the roofless section of the stadium in image 5, which exposes them to the blazing sun and other weather conditions. Such a reality implies that RMCK enjoys majestic social, political and professional positions which paves his way to dominate the participants who are identified with low social statuses. In the lens of Van Dijk's (2006) social dimension of manipulation, this showcases additional social aspects of manipulation supplementing those identified by Kambou and Traoré (2020) in Burkina Faso.

-Strategies for cognitive and discursive manipulation

The discursive manipulation of social cognition according to Van Dijk (2006) refers to the modification of social belief through the formation of preferred mental models of the dominated group. To achieve this, the dominant group discursively resort to verbal and non-verbal elements. The findings of this study reveal that RMCK and his party used discursive moves, as highlighted in the quantitative data above, and visual elements to influence the processing of their speeches.

-The verbal characteristics of cognitive mind control

This subsection deals with the verbal means of cognitive mind control in a form of discursive categories employed utilized by RMCK in his attempt to gear the recipient's actions towards his interest.

-Consensus

Consensus is according to Van Dijk (2000) a 'political strategy' used to portray or emphasize the national importance of some issues. This suggests a call for unity between the speaker's group and the recipients one to preserve what is often subtly depicted as national interest. As the quantitative data suggest, RMCK mostly used consensus in his manipulative venture. By employing the seven (7) consensus moves, he attempts to influence his audience's understanding of his own interest of winning the election by portraying it as a shared interest with the populace. This move is perceivable in the excerpt below.

(1) *'Comrades, we have a common will.'* (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation). (FT: Appendix 3, final speech)

"Camarades, nous avons la volonté commune."

This move inevitably creates a biased belief that they share a common will with RMCK and consequently reinforce their sense of belonging to the in-group represented by him against his opponents. The term 'comrade' associated with «we» and 'common' in this excerpt plays a significant role in his call for unity because it expresses strong bond built on shared values, goals and class equality. In combining himself with the participants through the personal pronoun 'we' he strives to portray them as a collective unit (the In-group) in the mental models of the latter whose actions in favour of RMCK's election is pretendedly in the best interest of the whole nation.

-Fallacies

Fallacies considered as argumentative strategies that entail an incoherent relation between the premises and the conclusions. For Van Dijk (2006), some fallacies that are hard to resist can be used for persuading people or making them take a given action. This strategy, including the authority fallacy, appears to be the second most employed by RMCK in his rally speeches. The excerpt below illustrates the MPP's candidate recourse to six (6) fallacies to legitimize his argumentations.

(2) *'Our ancestors will bless us, and we will achieve our goals.'* (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation). (FT: Appendix 2, Mid- campaign speech).

"Nos ancêtres nous béniront. Et nous atteindrons nos objectifs".

(3) *'The will of God and the will of man are not the same. That's why we are able to stand before you today to exchange views with you.'* (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (My translation). (FT: Appendix 2, Mid- campaign speech)

"La volonté de Dieu et celle des humains ne sont pas pareilles. C'est pourquoi nous pouvons nous tenir devant vous aujourd'hui pour échanger avec vous." In excerpt two, he attempts to take advantage of the deep bond between the recipients and their ancestors, insinuating that 'our ancestors' (his own in association with the participants) are supporting them in the battle for the presidency. Similarly in excerpt three, he leverages the dogmatic inclination of the participant regarding the Almighty God to persuade the voters. He insinuates that God having a superpower supports him and his party unlike his opponents who wishes them bad fate. Both excerpt exhibit authority fallacy intending to modify the socially shared mental models of the recipients to the benefits of his candidacy.

-Ideological polarization

Polarization basically refers to a strategic categorization of people into groups usually considered as in groups including us and out one including them. Such a move aims at glorifying the former to the detriment of the latter. "Manipulative discourses often feature the usual ideological polarization patterns at all levels of analysis" (Van Dijk, 2006, p.374). Those patterns are usually identified in terms of clash between the In group and the Out one (US vs THEM) and to some extent positive self-presentation and other negative presentations. RMCK uses this strategy to emphasize the legitimacy of his candidacy as well as his fitness to win the election while discrediting his opponents. This is intended to influence the mental models of the voters to enact in his best interests. The following excerpts out the total four (4) employed exhibit these patterns of the ideological polarization in question.

(4) *'They are talking into the void. As for development, we are the ones who can develop. They can't develop anything.'* (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation) (FT: Appendix 2, Mid- campaign speech)

"Ils parlent dans le vide. Quant au développement, c'est nous qui pouvons développer. Ils ne peuvent rien développer".

(5) *'After the victories we have achieved over these first five years, despite the difficulties I have just mentioned that have hampered our work, we have achieved results. We're not here to sell hot air, we have got achievements, we have got a programme, and we have got concrete action on the ground. We don't come to sell what we don't know.'* (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation) (FT: Appendix 1, Announcement speech)

"Après les victoires que nous avons rencontrées sur ces 5 premières années malgré les difficultés que je viens de citer qui ont freiné notre travail, nous avons eu des résultats. Nous, on ne vient pas vendre du vent, on a des réalisations, on a un programme et on a du concret sur le terrain. On ne vient pas vendre ce qu'on ne connaît pas".

In excerpt four, he polarizes his group's fitness and competences in the position of president with the others. He portrays himself associated with his group as the legitimate and the right candidate to vote to the detriment of the others because his group is the 'one who can develop' while the others cannot. Similarly in excerpt five his polarization strategy appears as a form of positive self-presentation through the glorification of his past achievements when he says 'we have achieved results' and his preparedness for future challenges. This is contrasted with his portrayal of the opponents whom he considers as 'confused people ignoring the process of elections in the excerpt below:

(6) *'These people are so confused that they don't even know how the elections are going anymore.'* (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (My translation) (FT: Appendix3, Final speech).

"Ces gens sont tellement troublés qu'ils ne savent même plus comment les élections se passent".

-History as a lesson

This move refers to an argumentative move that recalls or reflects historical facts or events into a present one implying that the latter can be relevant or better compared to the former. This tends to be a kind of generalization that gears the shared social representations of the participant towards a sympathy for the speaker's perspective. RMCK takes his success in upcoming election for granted building on the experience of his party during the previous presidential election. As stated in the excerpt below out of the four (4) used, he wants the recipients to believe that he will be successful because the same process (starting his electoral campaign in the Haut Bassin Region) will lead to the same result with the support of the recipients.

(7) When the first presidential campaign was launched. It was here, in the town of Sya, with the people of the Haut-Bassins region that we launched the campaign, which brought us a lot of luck.(...) What we managed to do yesterday together. Dear supporters, dear friends, we will do it again on the evening of November 22nd.' (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation) (FT: Appendix1, Announcement speech).

“Au lancement de la première campagne présidentielle. C’est ici, dans la ville de Sya, avec les populations des hauts-bassins que nous avons lancé la campagne et qui nous a apporté beaucoup de chance. (...) Ce que nous avons réussi à faire hier ensemble. Chers militantes et militants, chers amis, nous le referons au soir du 22 novembre. ”

In other words, by inciting connection with the previous successful process that is repeated, the MPP candidate highlights his trustworthiness and the relevance of the voters' actions in his favour.

-Populism

RMCK uses the populist moves four (4) times to strategically portray his closeness with the realities of the populace as excerpt 8 exhibits:

(8) 'The people of Burkina Faso know what's going on and they are the ones who are going to defend their interests today.' (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation) (FT: Appendix1, Announcement speech)

“Le peuple Burkinabè connaît les choses et ce sont eux qui vont défendre pied à pied leurs intérêts aujourd'hui”

In this excerpt, he appears to be an authentic voice of the people since he pretends to know the interest of the people and what they are going to do about it. In the same line, he claims to know the strong desires of the recipients and even depicts them as own goals in excerpt 9 as follows:

(9) 'We also want to work so that there are jobs for young people and so that we can ensure the empowerment of women. We want to organise a transformation at all levels.' (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation) (FT: Appendix 3, Final speech)

“Nous voulons également travailler pour qu'il y ait de l'emploi pour les jeunes et que nous puissions faire en sorte d'assurer l'autonomisation des femmes. Nous voulons organiser une transformation à tous les niveaux”.

As he clearly knows the aspirations of his audience, he connects them to his policy agenda to easily influence the mental models of the participants so that they can vote for him.

-Rhetorical devices

MPP party's candidate employed various rhetorical devices including metaphors, hyperboles and rhetorical questions in his rally discourses. Building on their influence on argumentative activities, which is even higher when the recipients are not equipped to resist power abuse, he resorts to this strategy to emphasize his perspective, appeal to the listeners sympathy among other ends. While the hyperbolic term “knockout” referring to the way he intends to win the election make his message more memorable in excerpt 10, the rhetorical question in excerpt 11 amplifies the relevance of his candidacy basing on his previous significant results.

(10) ‘*It was thanks to the knockout that we are in power today.*’ (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation) (FT: Appendix 1, Announcement speech).

“C'est grâce au coup KO que nous sommes aujourd'hui au pouvoir”.

(11) ‘If we had achieved nothing, would the people have stood up to support us and ask us to take back power?’ (Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, candidate of the MPP party) (Our translation) (FT: Appendix 2, Mid- campaign speech)

“Si nous n'avions rien réalisé les populations se tiendraient-elles debout pour nous soutenir nous demandant de reprendre le pouvoir ?”

This is congruent with Van Dijk's (2006) standpoint on the verbal characteristics of manipulation which he illustrated by Tony Blair's use of various discursive categories in his manipulative attempt including the above-mentioned ones. In the same line, Krisagbedo *et al.* (2021) from Nigeria as well as Allagbe *et al.* (2022) from Niger and Benin consistently identified similar verbal categories as determinant strategies in manipulation. In the Burkinabè context, this study aligns with Kambou & Traoré (2020) and Sanou (2022) views about verbal patterns manipulation featuring similar discursive categories to some extent. This suggests that the verbal characteristics of manipulation remain a significant aspect to cover in manipulative discourses.

-The non-verbal forms of cognitive mind control.

For Van Dijk (2006), processes of manipulation of people through mind control also operate with forms of non-verbal elements including pictures, symbols, the use of colours, bold fonts and salient positions of text in printing to name but a few. RMCK and his party displayed these elements in the picture below to trigger the formation of his preferred mental models in the social representation of the participants. Kientega (2025) corroborates in this line that the longer visual elements are exposed to the sight of the populace, the more they integrate them into their mental models.

Figure 2: *The non-verbal means of cognitive mind control*

Source: Screenshots from the announcement speech video on 3TV YouTube Chanel, December 2024

In this case, RMCK seeks to amplify his positive self-presentation in the mindsets of the participants through the predominance of the orange colour representing his party, the bold fonts and large printing of his slogans and photos on the banners combine with their salient positions. Similarly, the large font printing of the approval symbol (✓) subtly urges the viewers to accept and support his candidacy. In other words, RMCK employs these visuals based on their fast processed nature to control the voters' mind so that they can cast their votes for him. Drawing upon Van Dijk's (2006) non-verbal elements of manipulation, this study aligns with Kientega (2025) which identified similar non-verbal features of manipulation in a comparative study of the rally discourses delivered by two political parties in Burkina Faso. Consistently, Duszak *et al.* (2012) from Poland identified images and symbols operations in the recipients' emotions as a factor of cognitive influence. However, even though these studies covered a significant number of non-verbal elements, other characteristics are yet to be explored.

Conclusion

This article examined three of RMCK's 2020 election rally discourses in the lens of Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach to manipulation to determine their impact in the outcome of the election. The investigation of selected speeches through the social, the cognitive and the discursive dimensions of manipulation revealed that the rally discourses comprise power abuse and cognitive mind control. More specifically, we found in this study that RMCK utilized verbal and non-verbal characteristics of manipulation to influence the voters to enact in his best interest. Consequently, we recommend the implementation of educational policies that develop critical thinking skills among the citizens as well as raising the lay people awareness about the influence of manipulative strategies in an electoral context. The findings of this study exhibit an effective contribution to body of knowledge of

CDA. However, it urges future studies in the fields to focus on the recipients' perception of the manipulative strategies in political discourse.

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APPENDICES

RMCK's announcement speech delivered in Bobo Dioulasso on November 5th 2020:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3rLPsFqvWU&t=6538s>

RMCK's mid-campaign speech delivered in Ziniaré on November 12th, 2020:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3hnoHVF-h0>

RMCK's final speech delivered in Ouagadougou on November 20th, 2020:
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=222565646058673>

