Shaping Public Discourse: Analyzing Populist Strategies in AfD's Communication on Migration via Social Media

Bachelor Thesis

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Abstract

Purpose: In the context of a changing political scene in Europe. The purpose of this research is to analyze the specific strategies and implications the German party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) uses to shape the public discourse on the topic of migration. There is already different literature on the populist strategies of far-right parties, most of them focus on traditional media. In our digital age, it is important to also research populist strategies regarding social media. Therefore, this study will explore the strategies of populist parties, especially on X (former Twitter) on the topic of migration.

Method: A qualitative content analysis of tweets was conducted using Excel. The tweets were scraped from four influential AfD accounts over the time period of one year starting from May 2023 till May 2024. In total 406 tweets were coded with the help of a codebook, which was developed from different literature.

Results: This study identified significant patterns in communication strategies and argumentation styles related to immigration issues. Tweets frequently employ anecdotal evidence and emotional appeals, often combined with populist strategies such as challenging the political establishment and creating in-group/out-group dynamics. Statistical evidence is less common but still utilized strategically to support claims. The two main issues that were put on the agenda were "Crime and Security" and "Germany's immigration policy". Furthermore, the study showed differences in strategy on the issues that were put on the agenda.

Conclusion: This research affirmed previous literature on the populistic far-right and their influence on the public discourse, especially on social media. Furthermore, the research gives insight into the specific strategies the AfD uses to shape the public discourse on Twitter on migration.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the political landscape of Europe has witnessed a transformation, marked by the rising influence of populist far-right movements (Moffit, 2016). In Germany, the right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD) emerged as the second strongest party in the latest European election (Home | 2024 European Election Results | Germany | European Parliament, 2024). The AfD, originally founded as a Eurosceptic party, has evolved over the past eight years into a prominent populist radical right party, opposing immigration, the political establishment, and multiculturalism (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019). Arzheimer and Berning (2019) further highlight that a central force behind support for the AfD is a negative attitude towards migration. To understand the implications for the research it is important to understand the concept of public discourse.

Public discourse encompasses the ways in which ideas, values, and opinions are communicated and debated within a society. It is shaped by the content of messages, the methods of communication, and the broader sociopolitical context. Effective public discourse requires the engagement of various actors, including political leaders, media organizations, and the public itself, in discussions that can influence public opinion and policy (Habermas, 1989). The framing of issues within public discourse significantly impacts how they are perceived and understood by the general public. Frames simplify complex issues by highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others, thereby shaping public perception and discussion (Entman, 1993).

Populist parties have played a significant role in shaping public discourse in contemporary European politics. These parties often use a rhetoric that emphasizes a division between 'the people' and 'the elite,' addressing societal concerns to garner support (Mudde, 2004). This narrative is central to their communication strategy, as they position themselves as the true representatives of the public against what they portray as a detached establishment. This approach appears to resonate with segments of the population who feel marginalized by mainstream political parties (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Arzheimer and Berning (2019) emphasize that social media plays a crucial role in the rise and visibility of the populist right and furthermore advise further research in the field of social media. These platforms enable populist parties to communicate directly with their audience, bypassing traditional media filters and engaging in real-time interactions. Sharma and Sivakumar (2023) further illustrate that social media, unlike newspapers, allows for active participation and immediate dissemination of party messages. This immediacy and interactivity make social media a valuable resource for understanding public discourse as it evolves. Therefore, social media was chosen as the focus of this study to capture how populist parties like the AfD contribute to and reflect public discourse. By examining their tweets, we can observe the themes and narratives that resonate with the public, providing a nuanced view of contemporary political communication.

Migration has become one of the most significant issues in contemporary European politics. The influence of migration and refugees, especially since the middle of the 2010s, has started debates about national identity, economic impact, immigration policy, and security (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). These debates are not just limited to political spheres but also have permeated everyday discussions, influencing public opinion and policymaking. In Germany, the issue of migration gained heightened prominence during the European migrant crisis of 2015, when the country took in over a million refugees and asylum seekers. This decision, while hailed by many as a humanitarian response, also fueled anxieties and backlash among portions of the population (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). Concerns about integration, cultural change, and economic strain became important points of public discourse. As a result, migration has become an issue that shapes electoral politics, societal attitudes, and the policies of both mainstream and radical populist parties (Brubaker, 2017).

This research seeks to examine the strategies employed by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party on Twitter to influence public discourse on migration in Germany. By analyzing the party's messaging, engagement tactics, and framing techniques, this study tries to get an insight into the methods of populist parties on social media surrounding migration and its implications for broader societal attitudes and policies by answering the following research question:

RQ1: "In what way does the AfD in Germany try to shape the public discourse on migration on Twitter? "

The research aims to contribute to the theoretical understanding of the discourse tactics employed by populist right-wing parties, specifically within the context of migration in Germany. This study addresses a gap in the current academic debate by focusing on the specific strategies used by the AfD on social media to influence migration discourse. Existing literature has examined the rise of populism and its impact on traditional media; however, there is a need for a more nuanced analysis of the effect of populism on social media platforms (Engesser et al., 2017; Stier et al., 2017, Arzheimer & Berning 2019).

The thesis will be structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework on the populistic far right, populism, public discourse, and the role of social media in public discourse. Chapter 3 shows the methodology used for analyzing AfD's Twitter activity. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the analysis, detailing the strategies and techniques used by the AfD. Chapter 5 discusses the results of the before-done analysis and implementing theoretical as well as practical implications. Chapter 5 also shows the limitations of this research and ends with a conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

The literature discussed in this chapter establishes the theoretical basis for analyzing the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and its discourse on the topic migration. Therefore, it is important to explore the populist far right and their ideology on migration, public discourse and the impact populist parties take on it and what role social media plays in it.

2.1 Populistic far right

This abstract will focus on the populistic far right and how it compares itself with center and left-wing parties. Blee and Creasap (2010b), build up the hypothesis that right movements are more known for what they are against and not what they stand for. Therefore, positions like, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTIQ, and anti-abortion are driven by the motivation of these topics emerging in modern Western societies (Blee & Creasap, 2010b). In traditional literature the distinction between the left and the right is made through their position towards equality, while the left wants to reduce social inequality the right sees these inequalities as nature-given and therefore cannot be reduced (Carter,

2018).

To distinguish the right-wing spectrum, traditional literature names a distinction between the radical right and the extreme right, the main part of the distinction is the use of violence, but also the position towards a representative democracy. In comparison, the extreme right is more prone to using violence, while also rejecting democracy. On the other hand, the radical right participates in the democratic system and mostly rejects violence (Ahmed & Pisoiu, 2020). Furthermore, the radical right is a political ideology or movement rooted in nativist or ultranationalist beliefs, focusing on ethnically or culturally homogeneous conceptions of the nation. It frequently involves criticism of pluralistic and liberal democracy, as well as authoritarian political ideals embodied by strong and charismatic leaders (Minkenberg, 2018b).

Despite the debate about the terminology of "radical-right", and "extreme-right" the organizations and individuals can be united in the shared ideology of nationalism, exclusionism, xenophobia, the quest for a strong state, welfare chauvinism, revisionism and traditional ethics (Caiani, 2019). Therefore, Pirro (2022) argues that the term "far-right" is used to sum up and collect the different actors and standpoints inside the political right-wing spectrum (Pirro, 2022). It uses the position of the (populist) radical right, which is illiberal democratic, and the extreme right, which is in their approach anti-democratic, and combines them both towards the term "far-right" (Pirro, 2022). Pirro (2022) argues in his article, that in the case of saying something about democracy harmful movement, it is reasonable to use the term "far-right" to sum up the radical and extreme parties involved in the right-wing spectrum. While the core ideology of the populist far right, consists of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, individual players of the party can also have other values like antisemitism, but the core lies on these three values and defines the radical right movement (Mudde, 2016). To understand the radical right position on migration, ethnonationalism is an important concept to distinguish. The core of ethnonationalism asserts that the borders of a nation-state should align precisely with ethnic boundaries (Kaya, 2005). Ethnonationalism is often associated with prioritizing ethnicity over state identity. In the civic variant, nationalism is portrayed as more liberal and inclusive, where nationality is linked to citizenship. Conversely, ethnic nationalism is depicted as conservative and prone to xenophobia, with the national community defined by shared cultural and ancestral ties (Hayes & Nagle, 2018). Racial ideology is one of the core features of ethnonationalists, but other features like nativism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, and misogyny, are as prominent features of ethno-nationalist worldviews (Bonikowski, 2017).

Nevertheless, it is important for this research to analyze the populist far-right and distinguishing it from other movements inside the far-right, the literature shows many overlapping features of right-extreme, radical-right, and populist right. Therefore, it is necessary to find the overlapping features, while also looking at the distinction between the literature does. Mudde (2007) makes the distinction with the use of populism, there are parties and members that are using populism (populistic-radical-right) and there are parties that do not use populism, but still have right-wing

ideology. When talking about the emergence of the populist-radical-right, the new right becomes important to take into consideration. The new-right is a movement created by Alain de Benoist in 1968 (Bar-On, 2014). It is a movement led by academics and intellectuals, which are in essence a non-homogenous group in their beliefs, but there are some underlying factors that are essential for the movement (Griffin, 2000). The first one that Griffin (2000) points out is that cultural hegemony is the key and the previous step for political action. Furthermore, it is pointed out that it is crucial to make the distinction between cultural and biological background. Europe should have its own traditional values, which are not compatible with immigrants from other cultures (Griffin, 2000). The core of the new right and especially the position of de Benoist, is that if an ideology leads the discourse, it is obsolete which party is in a position of power because the discourse surrounding the topic is set in a cultural setting and de Benoist, believes every revolution starts with cultural hegemony and is later set into a political setting (De Benoist & Champetier, 1999). Therefore, populism is actively encouraged by radical right parties like the AfD (Shroufi & De Cleen, 2022). Shroufi & De Cleen (2022) show in their analysis that the new right conception of populism is deeply entwined with far-right ideologies of nationalism and ethnopluralism. Populism, for them, is a means to protect national sovereignty and identity against global elites.

Therefore, and to conclude this abstract, the populistic far right represents a multifaceted ideological framework characterized by nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. These movements assert cultural hegemony and ethnonationalism, advocating for a robust state and challenging democratic norms. They try to achieve this by actively engaging in populism, while this research tries to give insight into the specific strategies used by the populistic far right, this abstract gave insight into the ideology and values of the populistic far right and defined it for the rest of the paper, to then later answer the sub question: "How the ideology of the populistic far right occurred in the tweets by the AfD on the topic of migration?". Furthermore, it is important for this research to get a fundamental understanding of populism, which will be conceptualized in the next abstract.

2.2 Populism

The predominant definition of populism, as outlined by Mudde (2004), characterizes it as a simplistic ideology that contrasts virtuous, ordinary people with a perceived corrupt elite. Both of these groups are antagonistic against each other. Rooduijn (2013) argues in his article, that populism is not strictly used by the right side but also by extreme left parties, both of them have different aspects but the core of populism stays the same. He states that the foundation comprises four key elements: firstly, populists highlight the importance of the general public; secondly, they critique the ruling elite; thirdly, they view the general public as a unified entity; and fourthly, they declare the existence of a significant crisis. Identifying this common framework is the basis for comparing populist movements across different regions and historical periods (Rooduijn, 2013). Other forms of populism that are dividing from the original are infusing an ethno-nationalistic worldview in the populism and drawing the line of the outgroup with racial, religious, ethnic, and political features (Bonikowski, 2017).

Furthermore, Bonikowski (2017) argues that populism is not an ideology, but more a political strategy. This is further supported by Miller-Idriss (2019),who identifies in her article three core global populist strategies. Firstly, there is a trend of cross-national imitation among populist movements, where tactics used by one movement are adopted by others across different countries. This suggests a degree of coordination or influence beyond national borders. Secondly, populist nationalist rhetoric often evolves from framing local interests against national policies to framing national interests against global influences. This shift reflects a broader narrative that pits the nation against perceived global threats or influences, contributing to a sense of national identity and unity. Lastly, there is the potential for the emergence of transnational populist nationalist movements. While nationalism typically emphasizes national sovereignty, there are instances where populist movements across borders find common causes, forming alliances or networks based on shared ideologies or goals. This applies again that populism is not only an ideology but also a valid political strategy.

Focusing now on the populistic right, it becomes difficult to dissect different parties and members and give them the label of populistic right, the differences inside the heterogenous group of the far right become different to study. Far-right actors sometimes construct the people as an 'exclusive collective subject, united through references to a common ethnic origin, language, heritage, and religion' (Katsambekis, 2017). Furthermore, the far right is the leading force in the use of populism when setting keywords and topics for the political discourse like migration, national state, and multiculturalism (Wodak et al., 2013).

To summarize, populism operates both as a political strategy and an ideological stance that polarizes society into 'ordinary people' versus a perceived corrupt elite. Its adoption by diverse political movements, including the far right, serves to mobilize support and shape public discourse significantly. Understanding populism is important, since in the previous section populism was identified as one of the key strategies used by radical-right parties, and also the AfD actively engages in populism. Therefore, the sub question: "In what way do the AfD's tweets on migration embody populist strategies?" will be researched in this paper.

2.3 Public Discourse

When talking about, the public discourse Habermas cannot be overlooked. Habermas argues that the public sphere refers to a space or arena in which citizens come together to discuss matters of common concern, often in the context of politics and society. Habermas argued that in modern societies, the public sphere emerged as a space separate from the state and the market, where individuals could engage in rational-critical debate, deliberation, and exchange of ideas (Fuchs, 2014). Furthermore, Fuchs (2014) argues in his article that the public sphere acts as an interface mediating between the economy, the state, and the realm of family and intimacy. It serves as a warning system sensitive to issues throughout society. Therefore, the indications that are being made in the public

sphere actively shape the political discourse, which is an important notion when we see the focus of the new right to achieve cultural hegemony in the public sphere. Furthermore, inside the public sphere civil society comes up, these are individual players like NGOs or social movements that want to shape the public sphere towards their interests (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

When taking public discourse and immigration into account, Bohman (2011) shows three primary ways in which public discourse shapes anti-immigrant sentiments. Firstly, the politicization of immigration issues affects the visibility of immigrants within society (Bohman, 2011). Heightened rhetoric regarding immigration serves to prime public discourse, determining which issues are perceived significant (Hopkins, 2011). Consequently, increased visibility of immigration issues, often facilitated by the presence of radical right parties, can shape public opinion and media coverage, impacting electoral outcomes (Bohmann 2011). Secondly, by supporting societal divisions based on ethnicity and nationality, political actors create conditions that amplify differences between social groups (Bohman 2011). This framing forces other political sites to engage in discourse that reinforces these divisions, thus influencing public perception. Lastly, political articulation can normalize anti-immigrant attitudes, blurring the distinction between mainstream and extremist views (Bohman, 2011). When prominent political figures show exclusionary rhetoric, it legitimizes negative sentiments towards immigrants, fostering an environment where such attitudes are more openly expressed and acted upon (Bohman, 2011). Moreover, the endorsement of such views by established political parties can further fuel skepticism toward immigrants among the native population (Bohman, 2011).

To shape the public discourse in a desirable direction, the concept of framing is important. The theory of news framing is rooted in the idea that the way information is presented significantly affects how it is perceived by audiences. Frames highlight certain aspects of reality while hiding others, shaping a narrative, and guiding the audience (Vreese, 2005). Vreese (2005), outlines that framing serves multiple functions, including defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting solutions. These functions are carried out through different types of frames. Issue-specific frames vary widely and are tailored to particular topics or events, while generic frames are applicable across a broad range of subjects. Generic frames include the conflict frame, which highlights conflicts between entities; the human interest frame, which adds emotional or personal angles; the economic consequences frame, which focuses on financial impacts; the morality frame, which situates issues within moral or religious contexts; and the responsibility frame, which attributes blame or credit to individuals or groups.

To further shape the discussion on public discourse, agenda-setting theory will be taken into account. Agenda-setting theory, first articulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), shows that the media plays a role in shaping public perception by highlighting specific issues, thereby influencing the importance placed on these issues by the public. According to this theory, while the media may not tell people what to think, it is highly effective in telling them what to think about. This process occurs through the selection and prominence of news stories, which effectively prioritize certain topics over

others. This becomes important because different groups fight to place their issues on the agenda. This process is crucial because those who successfully put their issue on the agenda often influence the resulting policies. Blocking opposing issues is also a key strategy (Birkland, 2017). Birkland (2017) highlights the competitive nature of agenda-setting in the public discourse, where groups not only strive to bring their issues to the forefront but also work to block opposing issues from gaining traction.

Public discourse serves as an arena for shaping societal attitudes and policy agendas, particularly regarding contentious topics such as immigration and nationalism. Investigating theories like framing and agenda setting who have an influence on the public discourse is important, to further understand the ways in which the public discourse can be influenced by different political actors. This part is directly connected to the research question. Since this study focuses on social media as a tool for interaction in the public discourse the next part will explain concepts surrounding the topic of social media and the influence on the public discourse.

2.4 Public discourse and social media

Social media has become more and more relevant for the public discourse as well as the people involved in it, Solovev and Pröllochs (2022) figured out three key benefits of the use of social media for public discourse. First, it increases the scale in which messages are spread, second, it enhances the dialogue between the political player and the user and gives room for discussion. Lastly, the politician is not strictly bound by geography, because he can use social media from every point of the world (Solovev & Pröllochs, 2022). Furthermore, social media takes over the role of traditional media in influencing the opinion of the people, therefore it also takes a big part in the influence on the public discourse (Sharma & Sivakumar, 2023). Social media nowadays has become a tool for participants in the public discourse to set their own agenda, which was traditionally the role of mainstream news (Sharma & Sivakumar, 2023). In addition, Bolgov et al. (2019) write that the discourse on social media is open to anyone, with the distinction that meaningful discussions are to be found where problems for the whole society come up. Therefore, the discourse on social media is an extension of the public discourse, with the addition of the inclusion of every actor inside the discourse (Bolgov et al., 2019). The emergence of social media has facilitated a more emotional style of political communication, blurring the lines between traditional public discourse and celebrity culture. Politicians, especially populist leaders, adapt their communication styles to overlap with the emotions of their target audience, by the use of platforms like Twitter to engage with voters on a personal and emotional level (Breeze, 2020). Furthermore, Breeze (2020) argues that studies have shown that populist communication strategies, including people-centrism and anti-elitism, are prevalent on social media while the far-right and opposition parties employ them more frequently. However, these studies often overlook the emotional dimension of populism, which plays a crucial role in shaping political discourse and mobilizing support.

While populist parties in the past relied on tabloid media coverage for visibility, the advent of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook has allowed them to communicate directly and spontaneously with their audience. They now take the initiative and can do it when they want. Populist parties therefore independently use social media to blame political opponents, employing emotional elements in their communication to enhance persuasiveness (Bobba, 2018). Furthermore, Bobba (2018), elaborates that populist parties quickly adapted their communication style towards the rise of social media, which helped them to strengthen the support for their cause and win sympathy. The biggest aspect that Bobba (2018) names is the personal appeal of the leader of the populistic movement.

To conclude the theoretical framework, it provides an exploration of the ideological framework and strategies of the populistic far right. It distinguishes the far-right spectrum into radical and extreme right. Furthermore, it highlights how these movements utilize populism to contrast 'ordinary people' against a corrupt elite, aiming to achieve cultural hegemony and influence public discourse, particularly on issues like migration. The framework also highlights the importance of social media as a platform for populist rhetoric, which has become a significant tool for political communication and mobilization. To investigate this, an analysis will be conducted on the populist party AfD for its discourse regarding migration on X (former Twitter). It seeks to identify the extend of which populist strategies and far-right ideology are present in the tweets. The next chapter will present by what methods this will be executed.

3. Method

3.1 Design

The aim of the study is to investigate the way and strategy the AfD communicates on X. To answer the research question a content analysis on different X (former Twitter) posts by politicians from the German political party AFD was conducted. Due to the nature of rhetorical messages, which show differences in interpretation, this study employed qualitative research. To be more specific a deductive Twitter analysis was conducted, with the help of a codebook which was created from various forms of literature. To get a grasp on the public discourse, social media posts from AfD and members of the AfD, on the topic of migration, on X were analyzed. X posts primarily consist of textual content and were examined for their role in translating political topics into more understandable and concise public debate.

This method allows for a detailed understanding of how social media content serves as an indicator of public opinion and discourse. Social media platforms, particularly Twitter, offer a dynamic space where public sentiment and political narratives unfold in real-time. According to Fuchs (2014), Twitter acts as a "public arena" where political discussions are highly visible and immediate, reflecting

broader societal concerns and debates. By analyzing tweets from populist parties, insights can be gained into the dominant public discourse and how these parties engage with societal debates.

3.2 Corpus

In order to select the corpus for this study, first a selection of influential X-accounts was made, and second, a selection of Tweets was made based on various criteria. The most influential accounts connected to the AFD party were selected. The number of followers and also the position the accounts have in the AfD were the factors that describe influence in this case. The general account from the AfD (250k followers), was included because, it represents the official communication channel of the party, providing a comprehensive view of their public messaging and stance on immigration issues. This account reaches a large audience and is influential in shaping public opinion and political discourse. Furthermore, the accounts of the two party leaders Alice Weidel (490k followers) and Tino Chrupalla (85k followers) were included, because, they are key figures in the party, directly shaping and communicating its policies and viewpoints. Additionally, Björn Höcke's account (120k followers) was included, as he is a prominent and influential figure within the AfD, known for his strong and often controversial views on immigration. His tweets provide valuable insights into the more extreme positions within the party and contribute to a comprehensive analysis of the party's discourse on immigration.

From these accounts, tweets were selected based on a number of criteria. First, they had to have an explicit connection to migration, either by containing only migration content or by containing a combination of migration and other content. To ensure that the tweets were relevant, only Tweets with a significant number of likes, at least 1000 likes, were selected, as these tweets were considered to be relevant for the public discourse on migration. The timeline for this study covered a year: from May 2024 to May 2023. This timeline was chosen to capture a comprehensive view of the AfD's communication and discourse on immigration over an extended period, ensuring that the data reflects both ongoing and evolving narratives. By spanning a full year, the study can account for seasonal variations, political events, and significant developments that may influence the party's messaging. In the timespan of one year all tweets, about migration that met the standards were collected and coded, in the end, 406 tweets were collected, which covers all tweets done in one year.

3.3 Codebook

Based on previous studies and frameworks, for this study, a codebook was deductively constructed based on four main categories: Issue, Argumentation, Populist strategies, and Communication strategies (see Table 1), the full codebook can be found in the Appendix. The first category of Issues, with the subcategories Crime and Security, Identity Loss, Economic and Germanys immigration policy, aim to distinguish the overarching issue the tweet addresses, it is based on the

Agenda Setting theory of mass media by McCombs and Shaw (1972) and discusses the issues most prominent in right-wing populist (Wodak, 2015). The category of Argumentation, which was based on Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) model of persuasion, looks at the types of arguments and evidence used in tweets to support claims about immigration. Subcategories such as Scientific, Statistical, Experts, and Anecdotal were included to distinguish between empirical and anecdotal evidence. This classification was used to analyze the credibility and persuasiveness of the arguments presented. The category of populist strategies was based on the framework that was done by Hassler et al. (2021) and is included to identify populist features in the X-content. It includes elements such as Challenging the political establishment, reference to the people, and reference to the dangerous others. It differentiates between these three strategies and helps categorize the populist strategy behind the tweet. The last category of 'Communication strategies' is based on the work done by Vreese (2005), which suggests focusing on the rhetorical techniques used to influence audience perceptions and emotions regarding migration. This code was included to identify tweets that use strong emotional language or different strategies to persuade or manipulate the audience. By coding for these strategies, the research can assess the extent to which emotional and hostile rhetoric is used in the AfD's communication on Twitter.

Table 1: Codebook

Category	Subcategory	Description
Issue	Crime & Security	Tweets that focus on the criminal behavior of immigrants, portraying them as a threat to public safety. These tweets may highlight specific incidents or crimes committed by immigrants to justify calls for stricter immigration policies.
	Identity Loss	Tweets that express concerns about the loss of national or cultural identity due to immigration. These tweets may emphasize the perceived cultural or demographic changes resulting from immigration and advocate for preserving national identity.
	Germanys Immigration Policy	Tweets specifically referring to Germany's immigration situation, its policies, or its impact on society. These tweets may draw comparisons between Germany's approach to immigration and that of other countries or highlight the consequences of Germany's immigration policies.

	Economic	Tweets that focus on the economic impact of immigration, such as job loss, drain on resources, etc. These tweets may highlight perceived economic costs or benefits associated with immigration and advocate for specific economic policies.
Argumentation	Scientific	Tweets that present arguments supported by scientific evidence or research. These tweets appeal to empirical data and expert analysis to support claims about immigration-related issues.
	Statistical	Tweets that use statistics to make a point about immigration-related issues. These tweets may cite numerical data or trends to support arguments or claims.
	Experts	Tweets that cite or appeal to experts' opinions or expertise on immigration-related issues. These tweets may reference the views of academics, policymakers, or other authorities to bolster arguments.
	Anecdotal	Tweets that lack evidence or are not grounded in factual information. These tweets may rely on personal anecdotes, hearsay, or unverified claims to make arguments about immigration-related issues.
Populist Strategies	Challenging the country's political establishment	Tweets that challenge or criticize the government or political leaders regarding their stance on immigration. These tweets may express dissatisfaction with existing policies or call for political change.
	Reference to the people	Tweets that reference or appeal to the general population or citizens regarding immigration issues. These tweets may invoke popular sentiment or

		call for action based on the will of the people.
	Reference to the dangerous others	Tweets that refer to immigrants or specific groups as dangerous or threatening to society. These tweets may demonize immigrants or exploit fears of outsiders to garner support for anti-immigration policies.
Communication Strategies	Fear-mongering	Tweets that use fear-inducing language to emphasize dangers or risks associated with immigration. These tweets often exaggerate or distort the reality of immigration-related issues to provoke fear among the audience.
	Personal Attack	Tweets that personally attack individuals or groups based on their immigration status or views. These tweets often target specific immigrants or groups and may include derogatory language or insults.
	Dehumanizing	Tweets that use language that diminishes or dehumanizes immigrants, portraying them as less than human. These tweets may use derogatory terms or stereotypes to demonize immigrants.
	Emotional Appeal	Tweets that appeal to emotions such as fear, anger, or sympathy to influence the audience's perception of immigration. These tweets aim to evoke strong emotional responses and may use emotive language or imagery.

In order to analyze, around 50 tweets (10% of the whole corpus), were taken and reviewed by a second coder, who is familiar with working with codebooks. The results by both coders were then taken and compared to achieve a sufficient Cohens Kappa for each category. After the intercoder reliability assessment the Cohens Kappa for the category "Issue" was 0,72, for the category "Argumentation" it was 0,66, for the category "Populist strategies" it was 0,70, and for the category "Communication Strategy" it was 0,73.

3.4 Analysis

Tweets were scraped by hand and then coded according to the codebook in Excel, by hand. In addition, the likes, retweets, comments, and the Author were also added via hand. The posts were numbered from 1-406. The coding specifically was done in Excel, using a dichotomous approach to the codebook. If the tweet was referring to a specific code it was marked as (Yes) and was left blank when the code was not present. Once the data was coded, specific analysis was performed in Excel, which will be shown in the next section.

4. Results

This section is structured as following: The first part will show the main results regarding frequency, co-occurrence and shows how often each X-account talked about which issue. The second part shows the qualitative analysis of the four main issues. In this part the issues will be compared with the other three codes (Argumentation, populist strategies, communication strategies) in order to identify patterns and show the structure of certain tweets. The tweets shown are translated and the original version can be found in the appendix.

4.1 Themes

After finishing the analysis of the Tweets by the X-accounts, the issues of "Germany's Immigration Policy" and "criminality and security" were most referred to. In the argumentation of the tweets the AfD and their politicians used way more anecdotal evidence and argumentation. While there was little scientific, statistical and analyses from experts in the data. Many tweets included populist elements, such as challenging the country's political establishment (elite), and the creation of an ingroup (reference to the people) and outgroup (reference to dangerous others). Furthermore, populist communication styles were applied, through emotional appeal and fear mongering, which made up the majority of communication strategies in the data.

Table 2

Frequency of Themes and Strategies in AfD Posts

Category	Subcategory	N. of cases	Percentage
Issue	Criminal Immigrants	148	37 %
	Identity Loss	33	8,2%
	Economic	49	12,2%
	Germanys situation	176	44%
Argumentation	Scientific	1	0,2%
	Statistical	52	13%
	Experts	15	3,7%
	Anecdotal	326	81%
Populist Strategies	Challenging the country's political establishment	178	44,5%
	Reference to the people	96	24%
	Reference to the dangerous others	140	35%
Communication Strategies	Fear-mongering	147	36,7%
	Personal Attack	17	4,2%
	Dehumanizing	3	0,7%
	Emotional Appeal	242	60,5%
	Overall	**409**	

Furthermore, the tweets have different weight in the way of interaction. Tweets sent AfD politicians Höcke and Weidel, had significantly more likes in general than tweets sent by the official AfD account. In addition, the topics they discuss also vary between the accounts. Table 3 shows that the most active account on the topic of migration is the official AfD account. Weidel, also is quite active on X (Twitter) on migration over the span of one year. Höcke, did not sent many tweets but focused them on the issue of "Germany's Immigration Policy" and Chrupalla hardly sent any tweets focusing on migration. In the one-year timespan the study covers, two tweets were sent dealing with the topic of migration.

Table 3

Distribution of Issues Addressed by AfD Members on Social Media

Author	Crime & Security	Identity loss	Economic	Germany
Alice Weidel	30	9	4	25
Björn Höcke	2	1	1	25
Tino Chrupalla	0	0	1	1
AfD	113	18	38	125

Table 4 shows the cooccurrence between the different Issues with the argumentation, populist strategies, and communication strategies. It serves the purpose of identifying patterns in the tweets.

Table 4

Co-occurrence of Themes and Strategies in AfD Posts

Category	Scientific	Statistical	Experts	Anecdotal
Crime & Security	0%	10,9%	2%	87%
Identity Loss	0%	6%	0%	93,9%
Economic	0%	0%	5,1%	94,8%
Germany's Immigration Policy	0,4%	11,7%	4,6%	83,1%

Category	Challenging the political establishment	Reference to the people	Reference to the dangerous others
Crime & Security	18%	3,5%	73,8%
Identity Loss	44,7%	42,1%	5,2%
Economic	42,3%	42,3%	7,6%
Germany's Immigration Policy	79,4%	15%	2,7%

Category	Fear-Mongering	Personal Attack	Dehumanizing	Emotional appeal
Crime & Security	72,3%	0%	0%	22%
Identity Loss	7,3%	4,8%	0%	68,2%
Economic	7,5%	0%	0%	84,9%
Germany's Immigration Policy	9,6%	7,9%	1,7%	82,7%

4.2 Crime and Security

The first subcategory of "Crime and security" appeared 148 times and is therefore one of the more prominent issues. These tweets highlight criminal issues regarding migration, such as references to criminal activities by immigrants, statistics that indicate that immigrants contribute disproportionately to criminal activities, as well as general statements with framing immigrants as criminals.

"An 18-year-old girl has been in hospital since Friday after being "bitten" in the abdomen. The alleged perpetrator, an Iraqi known to the police, is on the loose. Despite being suspected of raping the young woman on a regional train, he was set free" (Alice Weidel, 05.03.2024)

The example above also illustrates populist elements by emphasizing the dangerous other "an Iraqy" and criticizing the current system "despite being suspected of raping he was set free". These populist elements often appeared in co-occurrence with anecdotal evidence. Furthermore, the tweet uses the communication strategy of fear-mongering and emotional appeal. It uses fear as a communication strategy by highlighting that the incident involved a young woman who was in a public space "a regional train", which could happen to anyone. Furthermore, the tweet emphasized that the "alleged perpetrator is on the loose", so he is still out there.

The combination of anecdotal evidence, fear mongering or emotional appeal, and populist elements occurred in many tweets belonging to this category. Take for instance the following example:

"There are no words for this crime: Three #Serbs beat a #doctor unconscious in the #emergency room and then attacked a nurse. With the #AfD, the Serbs would have been back in their home country long ago!" (AfD, 04.01.2024)

In this tweet the 'serbs' are referred to as the dangerous others, and there is a criticism to the current political establishment who apparently did not deal with this group of citizens in the right way, which the AFD would have done: "With the AfD, the Serbs would have been back in their home country long ago". Furthermore, this tweet includes an emotional appeal by starting the tweet with "there are no words for this crime". This tweet as well is using anecdotal evidence as its argumentation type, it presents a certain incident, and this time it includes three Serbians.

 Another example, of a typical tweet in this category is the next one:

"A 28-year-old woman was raped and tortured by a #Nigerian in Munich on Sunday night. These so-called individual cases actually show a pattern and reflect an unsafe Germany as a result of #massmigration! #AfD" (AfD, 19.04.2024)

This tweet demonstrates populist elements by emphasizing the dangerous other, labeling the perpetrator as a "Nigerian". The difference to the tweets before, is that the tweet implies an unsafe situation in Germany: "actually show a pattern and reflect an unsafe Germany as a result of #massmigration!" The mentioning of a situation is also visible in this tweet, here the AfD uses tweets speaking about crime and using statistics as their argumentation:

"Afghans four times more likely to commit crime: Faeser's ignorance is putting us in danger! These figures show the dire consequences of #massmigration: while around 1.8 percent of around 72 million German citizens were identified as #crime suspects in 2020, the figure for the approximately 280,000 #Afghans at the time was around 7.8 percent. The #crime rate is therefore more than four times as high. Nevertheless, #Minister of the Interior Nancy #Faeser (#SPD) remains stubborn. She still hasn't lifted the unspeakable #deportation ban on #criminals and #threats to #Afghanistan - her ignorance is putting us in danger!" (AfD, 16.08.2023)

This tweet begins with a statistic, "Afghans four times more likely to commit crime" This time

while also highlighting the nationality of the criminals (reference to the dangerous others), the AfD is using the populist strategy of attacking the political establishment, in the form of Nancy Faeser (interior minister of Germany).: "Faeser's ignorance is putting us in danger!" Furthermore, the tweets shows fear-mongering by highlighting that the ban on deportation "is putting us in danger"

Tweets that use statistics often have this pattern, they combine the statistics with the challenge of the political establishment and fear-mongering as well as emotional appeal:

"#Crime statistics: #Faeser's relativization of the 9.5% increase in juvenile crime as a result of the "Covid era" knocks the bottom out of the barrel. It is not German youths traumatized by the pandemic that are causing the figures to skyrocket, but predominantly those from Muslim countries of origin. #Deportation would be the only logical consequence in a functioning constitutional state. #ThereforeAfD #AfD" (Alice Weidel, 10.04.2024)

The tweet emphasized again the use of statistics: "9,5% increase in juvenile crime" and links it to migrants: "It is not German youths traumatized by the pandemic that are causing the figures to skyrocket, but predominantly those from Muslim countries of origin." which demonstrates the use of the populist strategy of creating an outgroup in the form of the dangerous other. In addition, Weidel is using the populist strategy of challenging the political establishment, again in the form of Nancy Faeser: #Faeser's relativization… knocks the bottom of the barrel." Furthermore, it uses emotional appeal as a communication strategy by ending the Faeser part with: "knocks the bottom of the barrel"

To summarize the category of crime and security, the AfD uses anecdotal specific crimes as a majority for their tweets. These tweets often, have a high co-occurrence with emotional appeal, fear mongering and anecdotal evidence is the main argumentation for this type of tweet. In addition, they use the populist strategy to create an outgroup in the form of the dangerous other. The second pattern that shows in the data, is the use of statistics in the argumentation. These tweets are not so popular than the one with anecdotal evidence. They often combine the shown statistic with the populist strategy of challenging the political establishment, while also using emotional appeal and fear mongering.

4.3 Identity Loss

The next code refers to the German identity and its loss through migration, this includes messages that emphasize the threat migration poses to the cultural, demographic, or national integrity of a country. While this code was only mentioned 8% of the time it does not have such an impact on the debate as other codes.

"With today's even faster #naturalization in the Bundestag, an illegal migrant can become a German citizen after just three years. The German passport is finally becoming junk. #Germany is dissolving like a bar of soap under a lukewarm jet of water." (Björn Höcke, 19.01.2024)

The above tweet employs populist rhetoric by creating an in-group (reference to the people) and an out-group (dangerous other), the "German citizen" as the in-group and the "illegal migrant" as the outgroup who is trying to enter the in-group by becoming one of them:" an illegal migrant can become a German citizen after just three years" . It criticizes the current political establishment, suggesting that recent legislative changes have devalued German citizenship—"The German passport is finally becoming junk." The tweet uses an emotional appeal with a metaphor: "#Germany is dissolving like a bar of soap under a lukewarm jet of water". The mention of "illegal migrant" and the implication that they can easily obtain citizenship is also fear-mongering. By emphasizing the quick naturalization process, it uses anecdotal evidence to suggest a broader, negative trend affecting the nation's integrity and stability.

The combination of creating an in-group and out- group in the combination with emotional appeal appears more often in this category, for example the next tweet, which was sent on the same day as the previous one:

"Maybe you'll soon be able to bid for German citizenship at online auctions... #ThereforeAfD #AfD" (Alice Weidel, 19.01.2024)

In this tweet, there is criticism of the current political establishment, which is implied to have devalued citizenship through lax policies: "Maybe you'll soon be able to bid for German citizenship at online auctions." This tweet includes an emotional appeal by using sarcasm to provoke feelings of concern among its audience. It uses anecdotal evidence by referencing the notion of easily obtainable citizenship. Furthermore, it creates a reference to the people, by valuing the German citizenship high an in-group is created. The hashtags "#ThereforeAfD" and "#AfD" suggest that the AfD would handle this issue differently, positioning the party as the solution to preserving the value of German citizenship.

The pattern of challenging the political establishment in combination with populist rhetoric of creating in/outgroups is also visible in this tweet:

"The traffic light parties and the #CDU would say: Islamization is not taking place. That is sheer denial of reality. For us, one thing is certain: migrants have to adapt to us, not the other way around! #AfD" (19.01.2024, AfD)

In this tweet, the term "Islamization" is used to create a sense of threat from the "other," in this case, Muslim migrants it creates an outgroup and is coded as reference to the dangerous other. In addition, it criticizes the current political establishment, including the "traffic light parties" and the "#CDU," accusing them of denying the reality of Islamization: "That is sheer denial of reality." The statement "migrants have to adapt to us, not the other way around" underscores the creation of an in-group "us" and the dangerous other "migrants". The co-occurrence also shows that the challenging of the political establishment and the reference to the people are predominant on this issue.

Another example for a combination of the reference to the people as well as challenging the political establishment is the next tweet:

"70% of #Germans are against the new #naturalization law, which aims to squander #citizenship even faster. The #Ampel is ruling past the #people! #ThereforeAfD #AfD" (AfD, 29.08.2023)

In this tweet, the AfD highlights public opposition to the new naturalization law by asserting that "70% of #Germans are against" it. This statistic positions the majority of the people against the legislation, framing the "Ampel" coalition (referring to the traffic light coalition of SPD, Green Party, and FDP) as disconnected from public sentiment: "The #Ampel is ruling past the #people!" It again has a reference to the people and a challenging of the country political establishment. It uses statistical evidence by referencing a specific statistic to support its argument: "70% of Germans are against…".The hashtags "#ThereforeAfD" and "#AfD" reinforce there opinion on this topic.

To summarize the issue of identity loss, the AfD employs populist rhetoric by creating in-groups (German citizens) and out-groups (migrants, political establishment), often using emotional appeals and fear-mongering to criticize the political establishment. These tweets frequently challenge the current political establishment by addressing that the ruling parties are not acting in the favor of the German citizen.

4.4 Economic

The economic code shows tweets that discuss the economic impacts of immigration. This includes arguments and evidence presented to highlight how immigration affects the job market, public services, welfare systems, and overall economic conditions of the host country. Also, this code with 12% is not the most discussed issue in the debate. One example for a typical tweet in this category is the following:

"If the refugees already recognized in Greece apply for asylum in Germany en masse, this will show the failure of all EU asylum "compromises". We must stop financial migration incentives immediately and secure our borders! #AfD" (AfD, 04.03.2024)

This tweet contains populist elements (challenging of the establishment) by highlighting the "failure of all EU asylum 'compromises'" and advocating for immediate action to "secure our borders." Similar to other tweets, it emphasizes an external threat, in this case, refugees, and criticizes the current system. The communication strategy here includes fear-mongering by suggesting a potential crisis if refugees "apply for asylum in Germany en masse." Additionally, it appeals to emotions by mentioning "financial migration incentives,", to suggest to "secure our borders".

In addition, a lot of tweets on this issue criticize and reference the political establishment, in the context of economic decision making as the next example shows:

"The UN organization #IOM, which is also financed by German taxpayers' money, is demanding 7.9 billion US dollars for "migration aid". Instead of feeding the asylum industry even more, we must finally invest in deportations and border protection! #AfD" (AfD, 23.01.2024)

The narrative is, that the money Germans worked for is being used for immigrants and asylum politics as mentioned in:" is also financed by German taxpayers' money ", which is emotional appeal. Furthermore, the populist strategy of challenging the political establishment, is present in this tweet by highlighting "The UN organization #IOM" the tweet suggests that a elite is demanding "7.9 billion US dollars"

The co-occurrence, shows that the challenging of the political establishment is a common populist strategy on this issue and the next tweet is another example:

"Of course, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Every #immigrant who enters #Germany illegally and receives #welfare here is committing fraud anyway. Those responsible are in the #federal government! #ThereforeAfD #AfD" (AfD, 15.08.2023)

This tweet uses the populist element of reference of the dangerous other, by stating that: "Every #immigrant who enters #Germany … is committing fraud anyway." Furthermore, "Those responsible are in the #federal government!" is a reference to the political establishment and another populist strategy. The tweet also contains an emotional appeal by starting with "this is just the tip of the iceberg". In addition, anecdotal evidence is used here, by not backing up the claim with other evidence.

A different example shows the populist strategy of reference to the people which also co-occurs quite high with the issue of economic:

„The migration summit should have made it clear: Peace in Ukraine is approaching. Civilians are largely safe. Negotiations are being prepared behind the scenes. The more than 1 million refugees will return to their homes. That will ease the burden on our taxpayers!" (Tino Chrupalla, 07.11.2023)

This tweet is referencing the "taxpayers" as the people and is creating an in-group, the out-group here are the "more than 1 million refugees". Furthermore, it is supported by anecdotal evidence, the claim that "peace in Ukraine is approaching" and "Civilians are largely safe" are not backed up or elaborated on.

To summarize the economic issue, it frequently uses elements like fear-mongering, emotional appeals, and populist elements like the critique of the political establishment. Common strategies include highlighting perceived threats posed by immigrants, criticizing the use of taxpayer money for migration-related expenses, and invoking economic concerns. These tweets often employ anecdotal evidence and create an in-group versus out-group dynamic, positioning taxpayers and citizens against immigrants.

4.5 Germany's Immigration Policy

  With 44% this subcode is the most prominent in the data, almost half of the tweets mention the situation of Germany's immigration policy in a certain way. This subcode shows, different tweets portraying the German situation as negative because of immigration, this can range from different policies that harm Germany, the society, comparison between different countries, and crisis the country might be in.

"It remains the same: every year a major city immigrates without the traffic lights or #CDU state governments taking action. The alleged "#border controls" were nothing but PR theater and window dressing! Real border protection is only possible with the #AfD. #ThereforeAfD" (AfD, 07.02.2024)

  The tweet above uses the populist strategy of challenging the political establishment, by saying that they are not acting accordingly to the situation: "without the traffic lights or #CDU state governments taking action". This populist strategy often co-occurs with anecdotal evidence and emotional appeal, in this case it uses emotional appeal by stating that the border patrols were only "PR theater" and "window dressing!". Furthermore, the statement of "every year a major city immigrates" is not based on statistics, scientific or the opinion of an expert and is anecdotal.

  Another example, for the combination of anecdotal evidence, emotional appeal and the challenging of the political establishment, is the next tweet:

"No one in the #Ampel government can claim that they didn't see the massive #migration crisis coming. For months and years, conditions at our #borders have been getting worse and worse. Regular #border controls now! #ThereforeAfD #AfD" (AfD, 25.08.2023)

  The tweet again challenges the political establishment: "No one in the #Ampel government can claim that they didn't see the massive #migration crisis coming" Furthermore, it uses emotional appeal, by stating that the situation at the borders became "worse and worse". The use of anecdotal evidence is shown in the lack of support for the tweet, the claim of a "massive #migration crisis" is made, but not backed up with evidence.

  A different tweet shows how the AfD, uses the populist strategy of challenging the political establishment, in order to advocate for their own policy.

"130,000 visas for #family reunification within one year: that's a disaster! The #AfD presented a draft law back in 2018 that provided for the abolition of the right to family reunification. Quite rightly so, as you can see! #ThereforeAfD" (AfD, 08.02.2024)

  First, the policy that involves migration is shown as a "disaster" and then later the party presents its strategy as the solution: "The #AfD presented a draft … quite rightly so, as you can see!". Numbers occasionally appear like in the example above: "130000 visas" they are used as an indicator of the problem. In addition, the data shows that the cooccurrence between the issue of immigration policy is heavily linked with the populist strategy of challenging the political establishment. The

cooccurrence is at 79,44% and therefore, suggests being the main strategy for this issue.

Furthermore, the cooccurrence for the argumentation is similar to the topic of crime and security, with 83% of the majority using anecdotal evidence, but 11% of the tweets using statistical evidence for their argumentation.

An example of statistical evidence is shown in the next tweet:

"AfD is the voice of the majority: 76% call for an end to #massmigration! This is a clear message from the sovereign: an absolute majority of 76% of respondents are against unlimited mass migration, according to a recent #survey by the #INSA Institute. Only 18 percent want mass migration without an upper limit. Once again it is clear that the #AfD is the voice of the majority, while the #Ampel government and the #CDU are completely ignoring the people and governing against them. We can therefore justifiably say that we are the only real people's party in the Bundestag." (AfD, 14.05.2024)

This time the AfD is using statistics: "76% call for an end to #massmigration!", to make a claim about the political establishment. The AfD claims to be the "voice of majority", while the established parties "completely ignoring the people and governing against them". This strategy is a combination of reference to the people as well as challenging the countries political establishment.

5. Discussion

This section will provide main findings into the strategies of the AfD, with theoretical and practical implications, and limitations. Lastly, the conclusion will sum up the research.

5.1 Main findings

The analysis of the tweets confirms that the AfD predominantly focuses on two major issues: "Germany's immigration policy" and "Crime and Security". The focus on Germany's broader immigration status and the criminal activities of immigrants highlights the AfD's strategic framing of migration as a central crisis facing the country. By showing these issues, the AfD seeks to align public sentiment with their perspective that immigration poses significant threats to both national security and societal well-being. The high frequency of tweets about "Criminal Immigrants" supports the narrative that immigration is directly linked to crime, fostering a climate of insecurity. Furthermore, the tweets heavily rely on anecdotal evidence, with a small percentage emphasizing statistic, in combination with the high frequency of the tweets the method appears to create a feeling of urgency. When around 37% of the tweets mention, crime and security and are argued with anecdotal evidence, the situation is described worse than it might be. It helps the narrative of the criminal immigrant, the few statistics that are being used fuel the anecdotal evidence with the necessary backup to create a national situation from individual cases.

An interesting finding is the different amount on sent tweets on the topic of migration, Tino Chrupalla for example posted only two tweets over the span of one year. This might suggest a division of task inside the AfD, where different members talk about different topics. It could also be personal

preference. Future research could investigate this further.

When comparing the results with the theoretical considerations earlier. Blee and Creasap (2010b) say in their article that the populist radical right is known for what they are against and not what they are for; this trend is also visible in the data, as the AfD's tweets frequently criticize immigration policies and the political establishment, focusing on perceived threats and failures rather than offering specific positive policy proposals. Bobba (2018), highlights in his research the use of emotional appeal in the language of the populist right, this is also proven by the data. On every issue, emotional appeal was one of the leading communication strategies and appeared in general 60,5%. The use of emotional appeal helps the AfD to present a simplified and emotionally charged argument that is easy to understand and resonates on an emotional level.

Furthermore, Bobba (2018) argues that the personal influence of the populistic leaders has a huge impact on the engagement, this proves also correct by the data. It shows a significant difference in engagement between tweets from individual AfD members and those from the official AfD account. Tweets from individuals like Höcke and Weidel receive significantly more likes and interactions, suggesting that personal accounts may have a greater influence in shaping public discourse. While on the inside the official AfD account, posts a lot more about the topic of migration, the engagement is much higher on the individual accounts of Weidel and Höcke. The focus on topics also varies among different AfD accounts. For example, Alice Weidel is more active on the topic of migration, particularly concerning crime and security, while Tino Chrupalla rarely mentions migration. This variation indicates a strategic division of labor within the party, allowing them to cover a broader range of issues and appeal to different segments of the electorate. Here future research could invest further.

Griffin (2000) points out that the far right make a distinction between cultural and biological background. With this logic citizen from Europe are not compatible with other cultures. Especially the issue of identity loss, has aspects of this theory. The German citizenship is valued higher and if migrants would get the citizenship it would devalue it.

De-Benoist argues in his article for the new right that cultural hegemony is the key to a revolution from the right side (De Benoist & Champetier, 1999), the AfD tries in their approach of winning the sentiment of individuals, to actively shape the cultural hegemony on the topic of migration. By their intended use of populist strategies and emotional appeal, the reader might be influenced on the topic of migration.

To summarize, the AfD uses Twitter to shape public discourse on migration. It is characterized by a focus on crime and the decline of Germany as a whole, the tweets have a preference for anecdotal over statistical evidence, and the use of populist and emotional appeals.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

With this study other researcher could gain more insight in the strategies and populist rhetoric, populist radical right parties use on the topic of migration on X (former Twitter) to shape the public discourse. While other studies showed that populism can be an effective strategy to win in the public discourse (Mudde, 2004; De Benoist, 1999; Griffin, 2000). This research reinforces these findings and goes into detail by showing the specific strategies and frequencies of these strategies by populist-right-parties on the topic of migration on social media. Furthermore, the research also developed a codebook, which can be used by other researchers to study different populist parties in different countries. In addition, this study delves deeper into how the AfD not only critiques immigration policies and the political establishment but also employs emotional appeals to evoke a sense of urgency and crisis. This contributes to a nuanced understanding of how populist parties use Twitter to mobilize public sentiment against perceived societal threats.

5.3 Practical Implications

Practically, this study contributes to understanding the rising influence of radical right populist parties in Europe, particularly through their use of social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter). The AfD in Germany is using emotional appeals and populist rhetoric to shape public discourse around migration issues. Recognizing the strategies employed by these parties can aid policymakers, media organizations, and civic educators in developing counter-narratives that promote more balanced and fact-based discussions.

The AfD's focus on crime and security and immigration policy, along with their strategic use of anecdotal evidence, suggests a need for enhanced media literacy programs. These programs should educate the public on the importance of critically evaluating sources and understanding the tactics used to influence public opinion. By fostering critical thinking skills, citizens can become more resilient to manipulative messaging and better equipped to participate in democratic processes.

Moreover, the findings indicate that personal accounts of populist leaders, such as those of Alice Weidel and Björn Höcke, generate higher engagement than the official party account. This insight can be valuable for political analysts and campaign strategists in understanding the dynamics of social media influence.

5.4 Limitations and future research

While the study contributes to the research of populist parties, there are limitations which future research might take into account.

The study is concentrated on Germany and the AfD. While it offers insights into the dynamics of populist discourse in this context, the findings might not be directly applicable to other countries or populist parties with different cultural and political backgrounds. The specific political environment of Germany, including its history, political landscape, and societal attitudes toward migration, plays a

significant role in shaping the discourse analyzed in this study. Therefore, the strategies and impacts observed in the context of the AfD may not be observed in other contexts where the political, social, and cultural dynamics differ. For example, the scale of migration issues may vary across countries, influencing how these issues are perceived by the public. Future research, could use the created codebook and apply it on a different populist party to see if the results are connected or different.

In addition, the sole focus on the three members of the AfD and the general account could be a limitation of the study. This focus might not capture the full spectrum of views and strategies within the party, potentially overlooking variations in rhetoric and approach among different members and factions. To include a broader range of members within the AfD could provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Furthermore, Twitter, as a social media platform, can lead to more provocative and polarizing statements. The platform's dynamic may skew the representation of the discourse towards more extreme positions. Including data from a wider array of sources, such as traditional news outlets, political speeches, and public meetings, could provide a more balanced and nuanced view of the AfD's strategies and their impact on public discourse. Therefore future research could look at a different social media platform than twitter to find overlaps and distinction between the social media channels.

5.6 Conclusion

This study focused on the way the AfD shapes the public discourse on the topic of migration on Twitter. By applying a coding scheme to detect the frequencies of issues the AfD talks about and the used strategies to convey the message. It turned out that the AfD is focusing on security threats and an overall negative situation in Germany, the strategy of the AfD aims to create a feeling of danger and insecurity in Germany. The AfD effectively uses strategies like emotional appeal and populism to present migration in a negative light. Furthermore, different issues showed different strategies, the issue of crime and security showed a lot of fear-mongering and the populist strategy of referencing the dangerous others. The issue of Germany's Immigration Policy was more challenging to the political establishment. Furthermore, there was a huge difference, in the number of tweets by the accounts, further research could explore why some accounts post more about the topic of migration than others.

To conclude, this research affirmed previous literature and gave insight into the specific strategies the AfD uses to shape the public discourse on Twitter on migration in their favor.

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Appendix A

During the preparation of this work the author used ChatGPT in order to formulate sentences from his own ideas. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

Furthermore, Grammarly was used in order to check for spelling and grammar mistakes in the work. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

Deepl was used to translate the tweets. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

Appendix B

Original Tweets

(Alice Weidel, 05.03.2024): *„Nach "Bissen" in den Unterleib liegt eine 18-Jährige seit Freitag im Krankenhaus. Der mutmaßliche Täter, ein polizeibekannter Iraker, läuft hingegen frei herum. Trotz des Verdachts der Vergewaltigung der jungen Frau in einem Regionalzug setzte man ihn auf freien Fuß. #DeshalbAfD #AfD"*

(AfD, 04.01.2024): *„Man hat keine Worte für dieses Verbrechen: Drei #Serben schlagen in der #Notaufnahme einen #Arzt bewusstlos und greifen dann einen Pfleger an. Mit der #AfD wären die Serben längst wieder im Heimatland!"*

(AfD, 19.04.2024): *„Eine 28-jährige Frau ist in der Nacht zum Sonntag in München von einem #Nigerianer vergewaltigt und gequält worden. Diese sogenannten Einzelfälle zeigen in Wirklichkeit ein Muster und spiegeln ein unsicheres Deutschland in Folge von #Massenmigration! #AfD"*

(AfD, 16.08.2023): *„Afghanen viermal häufiger kriminell: Faesers Ignoranz bringt uns in Gefahr! Diese Zahlen zeigen die schlimmen Folgen der #Massenmigration: Während im Jahr 2020 von rund 72 Millionen deutschen Staatsbürgern rund 1,8 Prozent als #Tatverdächtige ermittelt wurden, waren es bei den damals etwa 280.000 #Afghanen rund 7,8 Prozent. Die #Kriminalitätsrate ist also mehr als viermal so hoch. Dennoch stellt #Innenministerin Nancy #Faeser (#SPD) sich stur. Noch immer hat sie den unsäglichen #Abschiebestopp von #Kriminellen und #Gefährdern nach #Afghanistan nicht aufgehoben – ihre Ignoranz bringt uns in Gefahr!"*

(Alice Weidel, 10.04.2024): *„#Kriminalstatistik: Die Relativierung der um 9,5 % gestiegenen Jugendkriminalität als Folge der „Covid-Zeit" durch #Faeser schlägt dem Faß den Boden aus. Es sind keine durch die Pandemie traumatisierten deutschen Jugendlichen, die die Zahlen in die Höhe schnellen lassen, sondern vorwiegend solche aus muslimisch geprägten Herkunftsländern. #Abschiebung wäre die einzig logische Konsequenz in einem funktionierenden Rechtsstaat. #DeshalbAfD #AfD"*

(Björn Höcke, 19.01.2024): *„Mit der heute im Bundestag beschlossenen noch schnelleren #Einbürgerung kann bereits nach drei Jahren aus einem illegalen Migranten ein deutscher Staatsbürger werden. Der deutsche Paß wird endgültig zur Ramschware. #Deutschland wird aufgelöst wie ein Stück Seife unter einem lauwarmen Wasserstrahl."*

(Alice Weidel, 19.01.2024): *„Vielleicht kann man die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft demnächst auch im Online-Auktionshaus ersteigern... #DeshalbAfD #AfD"*

(19.01.2024, AfD): *„Die Ampel-Parteien und die #CDU würden sagen: Eine Islamisierung findet nicht statt. Das ist blanke Realitätsverweigerung. Für uns steht fest: Migranten haben sich an uns anzupassen, nicht umgekehrt! #AfD"*

(AfD, 29.08.2023): *„70 % der #Deutschen sind gegen das neue #Einbürgerungsrecht, mit dem die #Staatsbürgerschaft noch schneller verschleudert werden soll. Die #Ampel regiert am #Volk vorbei! #DeshalbAfD #AfD"*

(AfD, 04.03.2024): *„Wenn die bereits in Griechenland anerkannten Flüchtlinge massenhaft in Deutschland Asyl beantragen, dann zeigt sich das Scheitern aller EU-Asyl-"Kompromisse". Wir müssen finanzielle Migrations-Anreize sofort abstellen und unsere Grenzen sichern! #AfD"*

(AfD, 23.01.2024): *„Die auch von deutschen Steuergeldern finanzierte UN-Organisation #IOM fordert 7,9 Milliarden US-Dollar für "Migrationshilfe". Anstatt die Asyl-Industrie noch weiter zu füttern, müssen wir endlich in Abschiebungen und Grenzschutz investieren! #AfD"*

(AfD, 15.08.2023): *„Das ist selbstverständlich nur die Spitze des Eisbergs. Jeder illegal nach #Deutschland eingereiste #Migrant, der hier #Sozialhilfe bezieht, begeht ohnehin einen Betrug. Die Verantwortlichen sitzen in der #Bundesregierung! #DeshalbAfD #AfD"*

(Tino Chrupalla, 07.11.2023): „*Der Migrationsgipfel hätte klar ausdrücken müssen: Friede in der Ukraine rückt näher. Zivilisten sind weitgehend sicher. Hinter den Kulissen werden Verhandlungen vorbereitet. Die über 1 Mio. Flüchtlinge werden in ihre Heimat zurückkehren. Das wird unsere Steuerzahler entlasten!*"

(AfD, 07.02.2024): „*Es bleibt dabei: Jedes Jahr wandert eine Großstadt ein, ohne dass Ampel oder #CDU-Landesregierungen handeln. Die angeblichen "#Grenzkontrollen" waren nichts außer PR-Theater und Augenwischerei! Echten Grenzschutz gibt es nur mit der #AfD. #DeshalbAfD*"

(AfD, 25.08.2023): „*Niemand in der #Ampel-Regierung kann behaupten, er hätte die massive #Migrationskrise nicht kommen sehen. Seit Monaten und Jahren werden die Zustände an unseren #Grenzen immer schlimmer. Reguläre #Grenzkontrollen jetzt! #DeshalbAfD #AfD*"

(AfD, 08.02.2024): „*130.000 Visa zum #Familiennachzug innerhalb eines Jahres: Das ist eine Katastrophe! Die #AfD präsentierte schon 2018 einen Gesetzentwurf, der die Abschaffung des Anspruchs auf Familiennachzugs vorsah. Völlig zu Recht, wie man sieht! #DeshalbAfD*"

(AfD, 14.05.2024): „*Voll auf #AfD-Kurs: 76 % der #Deutschen wollen mehr #Grenzkontrollen! Diese Zahlen sind eine echte Ermutigung für unsere #Politik: Laut einer aktuellen #Umfrage des #INSA-Instituts spricht sich eine große Mehrheit der Deutschen für konsequenten*"

Appendix C

Complete Codebook

Code 1: Issue

- **Crime and security**: Tweets that focus on the criminal behavior of immigrants, portraying them as a threat to public safety. These tweets may highlight specific incidents or crimes committed by immigrants to justify calls for stricter immigration policies.

  - *Example*: "Another innocent victim killed by an illegal immigrant. We need to crack down on criminals entering our country!"

- **Identity loss**: Tweets that express concerns about the loss of national or cultural identity due to immigration. These tweets may emphasize the perceived cultural or demographic changes resulting from immigration and advocate for preserving national identity.

  - *Example*: "Our culture and way of life are disappearing because of mass immigration. We must preserve our national identity!"

- **Germany's immigration policy**: Tweets specifically referring to Germany's immigration situation, its policies, or its impact on society. These tweets may draw comparisons between Germany's approach to immigration and that of other countries or highlight the consequences of Germany's immigration policies.

- *Example*: "Germany's open-door policy has led to chaos and violence in the streets. We can't let the same happen here!"

- **Economic**: Tweets that focus on the economic impact of immigration, such as job loss, drain on resources, etc. These tweets may highlight perceived economic costs or benefits associated with immigration and advocate for specific economic policies.

  - *Example*: "Illegal immigrants are taking jobs from hard-working Americans and draining our economy. We need to prioritize our citizens!"

Code 2: Argumentation

- **Scientific**: Tweets that present arguments supported by scientific evidence or research. These tweets appeal to empirical data and expert analysis to support claims about immigration-related issues.

  - *Example*: "Studies show that immigrants contribute more to our economy than they take. We need immigration policies based on facts, not fear."

- **Statistical**: Tweets that use statistics to make a point about immigration-related issues. These tweets may cite numerical data or trends to support arguments or claims.

  - *Example*: "Immigration has led to a 20% increase in crime in our cities. We must take action to protect our citizens."

- **Experts**: Tweets that cite or appeal to experts' opinions or expertise on immigration-related issues. These tweets may reference the views of academics, policymakers, or other authorities to bolster arguments.

  - *Example*: "Leading economists agree that immigration is essential for our country's economic growth and prosperity."

- **Anecdotal**: Tweets that lack evidence or are not grounded in factual information. These tweets may rely on personal anecdotes, hearsay, or unverified claims to make arguments about immigration-related issues.

  - *Example*: "I heard from a friend that immigrants are taking all the jobs in our town. We need to do something about it!"

Code 3: Populist strategies

- **Challenging the country's political establishment**: Tweets that challenge or criticize the government or political leaders regarding their stance on immigration. These tweets may express dissatisfaction with existing policies or call for political change.

  - *Example*: "Our politicians have failed us on immigration. It's time for real change and leaders who will put America first!"

- **Reference to the people**: Tweets that reference or appeal to the general population or citizens regarding immigration issues. These tweets may invoke popular sentiment or call for action based on the will of the people.

  - *Example*: "We must listen to the voices of the American people who overwhelmingly want stronger border security and immigration reform."

- **Reference to the dangerous others**: Tweets that refer to immigrants or specific groups as dangerous or threatening to society. These tweets may demonize immigrants or exploit fears of outsiders to garner support for anti-immigration policies.

  - *Example*: "We can't ignore the threat posed by radical Islamic terrorists who infiltrate our borders disguised as refugees."

Code 4: Communication Strategies

- **Fear-mongering**: Tweets that use fear-inducing language to emphasize dangers or risks associated with immigration. These tweets often exaggerate or distort the reality of immigration-related issues to provoke fear among the audience.

  - *Example*: "Our country is under siege by waves of illegal immigrants bringing drugs and crime. We must secure our borders now!"

- **Personal attack**: Tweets that personally attack individuals or groups based on their immigration status or views. These tweets often target specific immigrants or groups and may include derogatory language or insults.

  - *Example*: "Immigrants are freeloaders who come here to take advantage of our welfare system. They're draining our resources!"

- **Emotional appeal**: Tweets that appeal to emotions such as fear, anger, or sympathy to influence the audience's perception of immigration. These tweets aim to evoke strong emotional responses and may use emotive language or imagery.

  - *Example*: "We can't stand idly by while our communities are overrun by illegal immigrants. Our families' safety is at stake!"

- **Dehumanizing**: Tweets that use language that diminishes or dehumanizes immigrants, portraying them as less than human. These tweets may use derogatory terms or stereotypes to demonize immigrants.

  - *Example*: "These migrants are nothing but invaders, bringing disease and violence to our neighborhoods. We need to get them out!"

Appendix D:

Literature Log

Date	Database	Search-string	Number of Hits	Relevant Hits
26th Feb 2024	Google Scholar	"strategies" OR "plans" OR "tactics" AND "right-wing" OR "far-right" OR "populist" AND "mainstream" OR "masses" OR "reach"	463.000	12
26th Feb 2024	Web of Science	"strategies" OR "plans" OR "tactics" AND "right-wing" OR "far-right" OR "populist" AND "mainstream" OR "masses" OR "reach"	2.700	23
03th Mar 2024	Scopus	"populism" AND "far-right" OR "political-right" OR "right-wing"	2.500	5
06th Mar 2024	Web of Science	"public-discourse" AND "populism"	58	4
15th Mar 2024	Web of Science	"social-media" AND "public-discourse"	540	12
24th Mar 2024	Scopus	"far-right" OR "political-right" OR "right-wing" AND "public-discourse"	150	7
26th Mar 2024	Web of Science	"far-right" OR "political-right" OR "right-wing" AND "social-media"	3.800	19
01th Apr 2024	Web of Science	"far-right" OR "political-right" OR "right-wing" AND "social-media" AND "public discourse"	3.400	15

Date	Database	Search Query		
02th Apr 2024	Web of Science	"far-right" OR "political-right" OR "right-wing" AND "social-media" AND "public discourse"		
05th Apr 2024	Web of Science	"far-right" OR "political-right" OR "right-wing" AND "Germany"	4.700	9
14th Apr 2024	Web of Science	"public-discourse" AND "social-media" AND "populism"	13	3