

Bachelor Thesis

***Who are the people?* A qualitative study investigating populist motives
across AfD's popular topics and their appearance in the public discourse.**

**UNIVERSITY
OF TWENTE.**

Jonas Albersmann - s 2718235

Supervisor: Dr. Sikke R. Jansma

Program: Communication Science

Faculty: Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences

Hand-In Date: 1st July 2024

Abstract

Introduction: Populism, especially from the far right, has been on the rise around the globe for the past years and continues to gain more power. This presses the urgency of understanding these parties and their mechanisms. Especially from a communication perspective, populist motives and how they are used across different topics have been underrepresented in literature.

Aim: This study aims to find ways, and differences in how the Alternative for Germany (AfD) uses populist communication style across different topics that are popular in the public discourse.

Method: The 5 most important topics of the party were assessed in a quantitative analysis of the topics within the main social media accounts of the party. Populist communication style was investigated in traditional news media, analyzing 113 different articles, and in the party manifesto. The latter was conducted qualitatively.

Results: All populist motives are present in the ways of communication by the AfD although they are used in different ways for different topics. Messages include emotionalizing and threatening claims directed to specific ingroups, outgroups, and elites while tying them to individual issues. Thus, the populist communication style is topic-based rather than all-encompassing.

Conclusion: Populism should be seen as something that can be adapted, changed, or assimilated based on the topic it is used for. Consequently, populism should be seen as topic-specific, acknowledging different issues within them, instead of defining and investigating it as a complete concept.

Keywords: Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), populism, populist communication, public discourse, topic-based populism

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Who are the people? A qualitative study investigating populist motives across AfD's popular topics and their appearance in the public discourse.

Right-wing populism is becoming more and more popular around the globe. Famously, Donald Trump was elected in 2016 and fundamentally changed the style of the political debate. Similar tendencies were to be observed in Brazil, and within the EU, Hungary has often been described as an outlier due to its populist leadership style (Evans, 2020). Accordingly, central Europe is not immune to this trend.

Germany too experienced a rise of a far-right populist party in the last decade, and it continuously influences and shapes the political debate of today. The debate about the party Alternative for Germany (AfD) reached a new high not many months before the making of the study. Reports emerged about mass deportation plans discussed by some members of the party, which led to millions of people protesting against the radical right AfD party and even some voices emerged to ban the party as a whole (Hille, 2024).

Controversy around the AfD did not only rise after recent deportation plans. Far-right parties in general frequently tested out boundaries of language use in the political debate (Wodak, 2014). It has actively influenced the public discourse and took part in legitimizing former taboos whereby introducing them into the mainstream. This is done by reinforcing different arguments that originally belonged to other fields. It can lead to a change of norms in public debate and a normalization of previously doomed topics (Krzyżanowski, 2020). For example, the German debate included religion as an increasingly important topic specifically concerning cultural differences. This included building a divide between Muslim and “Western” values which was mainly brought up by the political right (Sprengholz, 2021). Stark language has therefore been not the only strategy and characteristic of the party in recent years, but it actively shapes and dictates the discussion about specific topics.

When addressing the public discourse, many studies focused on how populist parties are positioned and perceived in the public discourse, and specifically political communication scientists like Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart (2007) have established that radical right populist parties such as the AfD profit from media coverage and are dependent on it when it comes to increasing electoral support. Adding to that, this study focuses on the ways the AfD is using the public discourse and news media to present its issues and it investigates the ways of how populist tendencies are being used.

When it comes to which overall topics were most strongly associated with the AfD in the public discourse, migration was brought up the most in recent studies. In general, right-wing populist parties were frequently connected to immigration issues and scholars defined it as the most important topic for these parties in terms of electoral success (Davis & Deole, 2017). While this might be true, little information is provided about other topics that populist parties address. This study will look at these different issues in detail and attempt to identify patterns, particularly in terms of how populist narratives or motives are associated with these different issues beyond immigration. This is especially important when acknowledging the communication strategies the party has been using, including mixing arguments that belong to different topics. Seeing through a mix of argumentation, the most prominent topics of the AfD will be selected and investigated separately. The study therefore challenges the generality of recent studies by delving into the specific topics in detail.

Based on all of the previously introduced variables, the following research question was developed and will be investigated in this paper.

How does the AfD use populist communication across different topics dominating the public discourse?

Combining, comparing, and analyzing different topics and their populist motives, introduced by the party, might create a new perspective, on how populism and populist parties are viewed as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

This section will cover a theoretical background from the research of populism, the reasons that make them successful, and their role in the public discourse. To increase the understanding of the AfD, this chapter explains populism in a general way, which will mark the theoretical foundation for this research. In the first section, this is done by introducing the main definitions and motives that are part of populism. It is followed by a particular look at populist parties and the means of generating electoral support. Determining the reasons and methods behind these parties' electoral support is a crucial component of understanding them. Especially for this study, it is important to understand if the mechanisms that were introduced in these sections reflect the ways the AfD is using populist communication in practice. Lastly, the public discourse will be presented as it is one of the cornerstones of this study. Also here, different theories are introduced relating to the means of communication by populist parties and how these can shape the public debate around them in a way that can be beneficial to them. As this study also investigates how the AfD is influencing the public discourse, the last section will contribute to that and present the contemporary state of scientific research around it.

Populism

Populism can be defined in different ways depending on the perspective or lens that is being used. In recent literature, it was often defined as a political strategy, ideology, or communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). This framework will follow this scheme but focus on populism as an ideology first, and then as a communication style. The core of populism as an ideology is rooted in an ultimate divide of society into two contrasts: the pure people versus the corrupt elite. According to Mudde's

(2004) definition, these two groups are inherently opposing each other as he states that populism should be seen as “*an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.*” (p. 543). Through this, populist parties act as a protector of the rights and needs of ‘the people’. Although Mudde (2004) gave a distinct definition of populism as an ideology, he still argues that it should be seen as a “thin-centered ideology” because it does not reach the same level of completeness as other ideologies like socialism or conservatism. Instead, populism makes use of different elements derived from other ideologies, which allows it to be attached to a wide range of ideologies and therefore to be used in multiple ways. (Rooduijn et al., 2016; Taggart, 2002).

Because populism includes different motives, it is important to understand the full scale. Playing out “the people” against the “elite” was already touched upon before by Mudde (2004). This was defined as anti-elite populism by Jagers and Walgrave (2007), where the “elite” is characterized as the core evil and only acting in its own interests (Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn, 2013; Rooduijn et al., 2016). Members of “the elite” are commonly identified as a threat by populist parties and would typically lead to an end of the “pure people” which based on the populist ideology needs to be prohibited (Hameleers et al., 2018). Therefore, populist leaders can mobilize their following with messages that include threatening emotions directed towards the elite. For right-wing populist parties, the elite is often defined as the political elite such as governing parties which are usually parties opposing them. Generally, it must be recognized that there is not only one clearly defined elite when talking about populism. Even within right-wing populism, leaders have been making use of opposing different elites. For example, Turkish President Erdogan has been targeting non-religious elites while the British party in favor of Brexit targeted experts in the EU who would make all the key decisions (Öniş

& Kutlay, 2020). Based on this, populists from the same ideological perspective can target different elites. Whether a single party also targets different elites when dealing with different topics, has not yet fully been researched. Therefore, this study investigates this specifically for the AfD and the different topics of the party.

Another characteristic of populism is the creation of ingroups and outgroups. The ingroup of populist parties often consists of the homogenous following of the party that is coded as “the people” (Hameleers et al., 2018). From a populist perspective, these people reflect an entire society, thereby ignoring a complex heterogenous society that exists of diverse groups and minority opinions (Hameleers et al., 2018; Maurer et al., 2022). On the other side, outgroups are considered to be a threat to the ingroup. This means that “the people” are played out against other groups often referred to as “the others”, which is defined as anti-outgroup populism (Fawzi, 2018). These outgroups can consist of different characteristics based on context. Some research suggests that this feature is predominantly part of right-wing populism (Schulz et al., 2017). However, Aalberg et al. (2016) define it as a core part of the populist ideology as homogenous ingroups need an opposing group to be considered an ingroup in the first place. In the case of radical right populism, immigrants are often marked as the dominant outgroup. Mudde (2004) relates this to the term *nativism*, which includes xenophobia, and nationalism. This combination allows the classification of immigrants as a threat to the nation and the values of the ingroup. This study will test this issue as well, while also exploring different ingroups and outgroups for other topics beyond migration.

From a communication perspective, it is not only relevant to look at the ideological characteristics of populist parties, but how these parties manifest themselves in the political discourse. Scholars like De Vreese et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of focusing on populist communication strategies, which are used by populist parties, but can also be applied by non-populist parties. Populist communication can be distinguished into *content* and *style* of

communication. The content evolves around core elements of populism such as anti-elitism and people centrism. These messages are then publicly spread using a specific frame or *style* of communication. This style involves negativity, emotionalization, and simplicity. This is connected to issues of identity towards the ingroup that characterizes them. (De Vreese et al., 2018; Maurer et al., 2022). The emotionality of messages directed toward different groups is only one aspect of populist communication. The way of communicating frequently goes beyond emotionality and tests out linguistic boundaries that were set by liberal norms thus standing out in terms of political communication style (Wodak, 2014). Therefore, these parties take a unique spot in the political debate leading to polarization.

Populism does not have an all-encompassing definition and must therefore be examined from different perspectives. The angle of ideological- and communicational definitions were covered. Additionally, an outlook on emotional characteristics that are typically part of populist content could be gained. Based on this literature, this study covers populist following way. The core elements of populism, anti-elitism, and ingroup and outgroup formation, will be analyzed for each major topic of the AfD, emphasizing the differences in populist communication styles across different subjects.

Understanding the popularity of populist parties

To know what shapes populist success and the general debate around it, it is relevant to understand why and how populist parties gain votes. Literature provides several possible explanations for this. As a first motive, Rooduijn et al. (2016) explored that the strongest reason for voters to vote for populist parties is that the policy propositions of those parties are in line with these voters' perceptions. This could then be called voting out of conviction. As a second motive, the authors state “protest attitudes” which refer to the extent of voters supporting the anti-elitism message of populist parties. Akkerman et al. (2013) also found evidence for these attitudes to have a positive relationship with populist voting. This means that this part of voters

is not voting for the populist party out of full conviction, like in the first motive, but just because they agree with the anti-elitism messages and therefore simply do not trust the rest of the established parties (Mudde, 2004). A third motive for electoral support for populists is called “issue ownership”. This hypothesis describes how parties can be the representative party for a core political issue. In other words, parties can “own” certain issues which will lead to a reputation that they are the experts in dealing with the owned issue separating them from other parties (Petrocik, 1996). For populist parties, this was often considered to be an immigration topic. If this topic is covered extensively in the national discourse, it can lead to increased electoral support for populist parties (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007). These three motives combine different reasons for support of populist parties. Especially for the second motive, one can see that it directly originates from ideological populism while it is effective in increasing party support at the same time.

As the heads of their representative parties, leaders naturally play an important role, so they do for populist parties. Literature provides a possible additional reason for populist voting which would be strong and eloquent leaders that can mobilize a vast amount of people (Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). This motive was however disproved by Rooduijn et al. (2016) who found that the assumption is also true for mainstream parties and therefore not a clear and sole reason to vote populist. However, it still is an important note to consider while it is also true that single leaders of populist parties have been less often in place.

As mentioned in the first section, populist right-wing parties are often associated with xenophobia based on Mudde’s (2004) explanation of *nativism*. This can be also applied to voting reasons. Gerling and Kellermann (2022) propose that the success of populist parties can contribute to the spread of xenophobic material throughout society. This is especially true for right-wing populist parties. As a result, the party may experience more success in the future. This means that there are not only specific reasons why voters choose populist parties but also

the fact that populist parties becoming mainstream impacts their success rates. Accordingly, it can become more acceptable to choose right-wing populists once their party has reached the mainstream of the political and societal debate. For instance, in the specific case of Germany, it was a long time frowned upon to openly claim to vote for the radical right party AfD because it would lead to decreasing social acceptance of the individual. However, as the party becomes more mainstream and more people openly declare support, this barrier shrinks and people openly vote populist (Gerling & Kellermann, 2022). This suggests that bigger exposure of the party in the mainstream increases electoral support without clear reasons for it.

Based on these findings, this study examines the ways the AfD positions itself in the public debate and therefore also the mainstream. This study will look into how these different voting interests are negotiated by the party when it comes to addressing different topics in their populist communication style.

The role of media and populist parties in the public discourse

Media play one of the most important roles when it comes to populist parties and their aim for electoral success. Media is the instance between politicians and the people and is also often described as the 4th pillar of power in a liberal democracy because it is the media that controls and reports about politicians and their work (Whitten-Woodring & James, 2012). At the same time, it is a powerful tool that can be used by populist parties to gain exposure, attract voters, and influence public discourse around different subjects concerning them.

In media research, agenda-setting theory is among the most used theories to describe opinion formation and the role of media in selecting important issues and with that priming users' perceptions of these issues. By showing certain elements frequently over time, the media can change the perception or the importance of these issues. In doing so, journalists can heavily influence public opinion or, in other words, shape an agenda (Cornelissen, 2020). Agenda-setting theory was divided into two parts by McCombs and Shaw (1972) where the first part

includes the salience of topics covered and selected by journalists. The second aspect centers around how certain topics are being covered. The latter can be related to populist parties actively pushing topics to be covered in news media. This was illustrated in the context of the Austrian far-right party FPÖ. It was stated that the party “must try to guide the media agenda and manage political and social issues in an active way, and to direct public attention to its framing of problems” (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007, as cited in Mazzoleni, 2008, p.40). This shows the will of far-right populist parties to actively engage in public discussion in a way that involves framing subjects to their benefit.

Therefore, framing by far-right populist parties plays a central role in this study as it can influence audiences’ views towards topics based on the ways it is reported. If the style of reporting is close to the parties’ line of argumentation or framing, it is more likely for the discourse to be dominated by said parties. As the previous quote showed, populist parties are seeking to achieve this by actively taking part in forming the discourse. This also includes selecting specific topics over others and therefore giving these more exposure, which will lead to more publicity of these topics. This can be closely related to the theory of issue ownership covered in the previous section. Parties that encompass a topic as a whole, or in other words “own” it, will have better chances to win elections given that this issue is greatly discussed in public discourse (Bos et al., 2016; Petrocik, 1996). Connecting this to agenda-setting theory, it will make a great difference in what issues are covered most in the media since the parties related to these issues will likely have greater success afterward (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007). It is therefore desirable for populist parties to have their core topics, like immigration to be represented extensively in the public discourse.

There are mechanisms that populist parties are frequently using to ensure that their issues are dominating the public discourse. As was already touched upon before, populist right-wing politicians are often testing out the boundaries of liberal societal and political discourse

by using strong language that might scratch the limits of the agreed-upon rules in political discourse (Wodak, 2014). In doing so, politicians can become the center of attention, at least for a short period of time, with the media reporting and scandalizing the subject. Accordingly, the societal discourse will be centering around these topics and therefore can be dominated by populist parties. This procedure has been described as populist agenda-setting (Schmidt, 2023). By this means populist parties can also push their frames on popular issues. Despite that, little research exists about specific topics of these parties and how populists popularize these narratives.

At the same time, it is still important for far-right politicians to be portrayed as ‘normal’ as possible in the media. On the other hand, radical utterances are what increase the coverage in the first place (Bos et al., 2011). For the media, it therefore becomes a dilemma of reporting, and contributing to more popularity of these parties, or not reporting and, with that, accepting the style of speech that far-right leaders often use (Maurer et al., 2022). One could say that in this case, any kind of publicity could help politicians from far-right parties, which Mudde (2007, as cited in Bos et al., 2011) hypothesized. However, when it comes to right-wing populist parties and the immigration issue, they are perceived as radical among the public. This leads to a decline in party legitimacy which is said to be the most important indicator of electoral success (Bos et al., 2011). Populist politicians are therefore challenged to find the balance between radical comments and appearing calm and rational.

In any case, the political and societal discourse is heavily influenced by these popular expressions and can lead to a normalization of strong language among the public. Valentim and Widmann (2021) found that citizens are likely to adopt the use of language used by populist parties when their success increases. On the contrary, it became clear that this is not the case for opposing political parties and their actors. Politicians of opposite parties use positive tones to distinguish themselves from the AfD which is frequently using emotionalizing negative

rhetoric, like other populist parties across Europe (Valentim & Widmann, 2021). The current discourse is therefore strongly influenced by two sides involving negative and positive rhetoric.

When it comes to coverage of populist far-right parties in the media, much is to learn about how media institutions interact with these parties and which of these sides are benefitting each other, or if the contrary is the case. Brown and Mondon (2020) found that the term populism is often used to describe the whole essence of a party, ignoring the underlying elements that often come with parties using populist elements such as racism, and radicalism. The authors argue that without a clear distinction between the concept of populism and the aforementioned aspects that go beyond, euphemizing racism or other societal issues will be the consequence. Additionally, it became clear that the media, in this case the British outlet *The Guardian*, categorized populists as an out-group in broader society. This, however, could lead to the point where issues such as right-extremist views on racism or immigration in general can be labeled as a phenomenon of populism as an outgroup and not as an institutionalized issue in society (Brown & Mondon, 2020). This particularly can play into the hands of populists as earlier definitions mentioned that in and outgroups are just the narratives that populists are working with themselves (Hameleers et al., 2018). Generally, there is evidence for the assumption that media coverage generates more party support, especially in Western democracies including Germany, Belgium, and the UK (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Murphy & Devine, 2018).

Because media coverage is a crucial factor in central Europe, the radical right party of Germany was used as a case for this study. As has been suggested that media nowadays work with in- and outgroup narratives, it implies the importance of including this concept to better understand how in- and which in- and outgroups are formed by the party. Therefore, this section concludes the theoretical background of public discourse and media coverage. In this study,

this information will become especially important when looking at different topics and how they are brought into the public discourse by the AfD.

Method

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to find differences in the use of populist motives by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) among current topics of the party. Current topics were chosen over general topics to ensure the topicality of the public discourse. When understanding how a party changes the use of populist motives, as well as their ways of influencing the public discourse, much can be learned about how the political landscape is shaped. This can offer a different look at populism and may influence the response different entities have towards it.

To put these aims into practice, the research design consisted of a qualitative content analysis of the party manifesto and news articles gathered from NexisUni. The articles were scraped based on the most important topics of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party. To define the most important topics to the party, an initial quantitative coding process was conducted listing the most pressing topics for the party. The quantitative analysis used data gathered from Twitter and YouTube. This ensures that the data and thus the topics are up to date. These served as the topics of analysis for the second round of coding where the populist narratives of Ingroups, Outgroups, Elites, and Issue representation were investigated.

In total, the mix of quantitative pre-coding of social media posts, and qualitative main coding of news articles was found to be the best fit. That was, because the first round did not investigate any populist motives within the topics yet, but only served to find the most important topics, based on the frequency of appearance in the social media accounts. The qualitative approach was only used for the news articles because here, the populist content but also communication style among different topics were investigated, therefore making the qualitative approach most appropriate.

Research context

The AfD did not always have the media exposure it enjoys today. The party started as a fairly small opposition party but changed and grew over the years. The AfD has not always been a radical right populist party but started as an EU and Euro opposing party. Accordingly, during the time of the foundation in 2012/2013, the leaders had strong neoliberal opinions. It then evolved more to the far-right spectrum and filled a gap in Germany as no party had been successful in that space before the AfD. A distinct event that is often cited as marking the transition is the night of New Year's Eve in Cologne where foreign men assaulted women. During this time the far-right views that already existed became mainstream. Today, the AfD is categorized as far right and a correlation between the mass migration into Germany around the time of 2015 and the success of the AfD party as anti-immigrant emerged. Accordingly, immigration has been the central topic defining the party (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019; Sprengholz, 2021).

Although immigration is still considered to be the dominant topic within the AfD, it is true that the party is also engaging with other issues. However, little research exists on the question of how populist motives are used when it comes to the other topics. This will be investigated in this study while accounting for the fact that populist parties are often able to shape the public discourse of a society using media. Therefore, these tendencies will not only be investigated in the party manifesto but also using news articles from traditional media.

To find out the most important topics of the party, an inductive quantitative content analysis was performed, categorizing the party manifesto into separate topics. These topics were mostly based on the different talking points in the manifesto which were already categorized into topics. Some talking points were, however, interpreted, which was the case with the talking points of "gender-mainstream" and "gender-neutral language" that were manually put into the "Culture, Language, and Identity" category instead of keeping them in

the “Science, School, and University” category (Alternative für Deutschland, n.d., p. 41). After the manual first categorization, this codebook was used to investigate four social media accounts of the AfD party and categorize the posts into these categories to determine which topics are most important to the party.

The accounts investigated were chosen equally from YouTube and Twitter. The twitter accounts were “@AfD” and “@AfDimBundestag”. The Youtube accounts were called “@AfDFraktionimBundestag” and “@AfDTV”. These accounts are the official accounts of the party and are speaking for the whole country of Germany. The posts were coded using a quantitative inductive content analysis. The timeline of the posts investigated was 2 months ranging from 01.02.2024 to 05.04.2024. During the coding process, new categories were added inductively to make sure that all topics were counted and registered. Posts that only included links to videos without clear descriptions were not considered due to the lack of text and therefore the lack of information to sort it into categories.

Corpus

To investigate populist communication in the public discourse, traditional media was chosen as a field of study. Specifically, print media was the source of investigation. While mass media is key for far-right politicians to spread extreme messages, it was found crucial to determine how populist motives or communication styles appear in traditional news media. It was chosen because it is considered to be the most important source of information for the broadest audience (Fletcher et al., 2020).

Based on this aspect, NexisUni was found to be the most fitting database to extract this data. It offers a comprehensive variety of news articles that can be filtered for specific topics that will be researched which is beneficial in this case since the focus lies on several topics. From the previous quantitative analysis of AfD social media accounts, the following topics emerged to be the most frequent and therefore most important to the AfD.

1. Immigration, Integration and Asylum – 68 posts
2. Culture, Language, and Identity – 49 posts
3. Energy policy/transition/ Economic policies of gov. – 47 posts
4. War in Ukraine/ Against sanctions – 33 posts
5. Europe, EU and the EURO – 28 posts

To ensure that the study was investigating the entire spectrum of the public discourse, multiple sources were selected from the broad German media landscape combining tabloid papers like “BILD” with quality papers like “Die Zeit”. Additionally, weekly newspapers were included as well. During the selection process, the news media selection of Wettstein et al. (2018) was taken as orientation and adopted which resulted in the following outlets: BILD, B.Z., Der Tagesspiegel, Die Zeit, Der Siegel, Stern, Süddeutsche Zeitung. With this selection among prominent news outlets from various standpoints from the political spectrum, the editorial bias was expected to be held low.

Not every article that covered one of the prominent AfD topics could be selected. As a general rule, articles were selected based on the requirement that AfD politicians are cited, or general views of the party are presented. This was the case for all topics. Based on this, positions of the party towards the represented topics were included. Moreover, quotes were expected to show how the politicians are influencing the discourse by using mechanisms established earlier. This is why the selection mainly included quotes to ensure that the party’s stance would be researched and not the media’s perception of the party. It was important to distinguish between the two instances because editorial bias or framing could neither be ruled out nor ignored. Furthermore, only German sources were selected to ensure the communication style towards Germans, as potential voters and the German discourse in general. From each

article, only the sections that cited AfD politicians addressed their positions on specific topics or contained populist narratives were content coded. Less relevant passages were skipped. For this reason, not every article is suitable for this analysis or contains a significant amount of bias such as comment pieces. Therefore, these were excluded from the search as well. Moreover, double articles were ruled out, just like general irrelevant content about other topics or articles that didn't contain AfD politicians' quotes or direct descriptions of the party's positions. It follows that one could describe this method as homogenous sampling in the sense of how passages and article characteristics were selected. The articles themselves were selected based on the purposeful sampling approach based on the previously described characteristics.

The articles for each topic were searched within the same time frame as the quantitative analysis of social media accounts. This was done to ensure an overlap between the time of importance of the topic, and the characteristics of the public discourse associated with it. Thus, ruling out biases that could emerge from times when the topics were more polarized. Therefore, the timeline ranged from 01.02.2024 to 05.04.2024 was chosen. When no significant number of articles including citations or references to the AfD were found, the timeline was extended.

For each topic, a separate search was conducted in NexisUni with individual search strings. A search string looked similar to this one as an example from the topic of Language, Culture, Identity: "gender" OR "Sprache" OR "Identität" OR "Kultur" OR "deutsche Kultur" OR " DeutscheWerte" OR "Gender mainstream" OR "Islam" OR "Multikulturalismus" OR "Islamkritik" OR "Moschee" OR "Rundfunk" OR "Medienpolitik" AND "AfD" OR "Alternative für Deutschland" OR "Weidel" OR "Chrupalla" OR "AfD narrative" OR "Populismus" OR "Rechtspopulist" OR "rechtsradikal" OR "Parteiprogramm". All search strings and the number of articles found for each category can be found in Appendices. In total, 147 articles were included in the analysis ranging from 22 to 35 per topic.

Coding and analysis

After finding out the most relevant topics to the party, the main coding phase could begin. This round of coding was done by combining an inductive and deductive approach. The initial codebook for the analysis consisted of pre-defined features of populism such as ingroup, outgroup, and elites (Wettstein et al., 2018). Issue representation was added as an additional category to understand the issues and goals of the party associated with each topic and the populist motives. These individual issues were found deductively during the coding process. During the third round of coding, related issues were combined into five different categories: Culture, Democracy/Politics, Welfare, Safety/Security, and Climate Change, which led to the final codebook. The coding process therefore combined an inductive and deductive approach to code for pre-defined motives of populism, and current prominent issues within each topic.

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, 10% of the articles were assigned to a second coder along with the codebook. Inter-rater reliability was then measured using Cohen's Kappa, a statistical measurement technique that quantifies the agreement level of the two coders. It was a crucial measurement in this study to ensure that the coding process was done neutrally. Cohen's Kappa was calculated for each core coding category: Issue representation, Ingroup, Outgroup, and Elites. This confirmed that the initial deductive codebook framework remained effective.

Table 2: *Cohens Kappa*

Code	Cohen's Kappa
Issue Representation	0.71
Ingroup	0.71
Outgroup	0.70
Elites	0.79

McHugh (2012) states that values between 0.61 and 0.80 can be referred to as a substantial amount of agreement. Given the results of the inter-rater reliability test, this is the case for this study.

Results

This section will present detailed findings about populist motives used by the AfD. For each topic, issues that were addressed by the party, ingroups, outgroups, and elites will be presented. Additionally, each section will include ways of communication by the AfD and present how this is influencing the public discourse. In the end, a clear picture of differences across the different topics will be visible, not only in terms of communication style but different groups and elites that were addressed. The topics will be presented in order of importance based on the quantitative coding process. Accordingly, the section will start with the topic of immigration. It will feature the most significant groups and issues for each topic and explain them in greater detail. However, a complete overview of populist motives including the sub-issues for all different topics can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Populist motives and issues for all topics

	Migration	Culture, Language & Identity	Energy Transition	European Union	Russia/ External Policy
Issue	<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Cancel Culture</i> (8) - <i>Germany with one pure culture</i> (2) - <i>Integration</i> (10) <p>Welfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Abuse/ protection social welfare system</i> (20) - <i>Economic decrease</i> (2) - <i>Labor market</i> (6) - <i>Old-age poverty</i> (3) <p>Safety/Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Border Security</i> (11) - <i>Crime</i> (14) <p>Democracy/Politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Direct democracy</i> (2) - <i>Europe of national states</i> (2) <p>Deporting (32)</p>	<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Cancel Culture</i> (6) - <i>Constitutional state</i> (11) - <i>Gendered Language</i> (8) - <i>German language = identity</i> (2) - <i>Germany with one pure culture</i> (11) - <i>Integration</i> (2) - <i>Internationalized language</i> (2) - <i>Positive understanding of Ger. History</i> (2) - <i>Reforming Media</i> (4) - <i>Traditional Family</i> (4) - <i>Traditional Gender Norms</i> (10) <p>Welfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Abuse/protection of social system</i> (4) <p>Climate change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Human-made climate change doesn't exist</i> (2) - <i>No renewable energy</i> (2) <p>Democracy/Politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Direct democracy</i> (2) 	<p>Climate Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Back to nuclear energy</i> (10) - <i>Co2 as advantage/ positive</i> (4) - <i>Energy prices</i> (19) - <i>Funding renewables = no market economy</i> (5) - <i>Human-made climate change doesn't exist</i> (9) - <i>No renewable energy</i> (17) - <i>Renewables are not effective</i> (14) <p>Welfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Decrease personal freedom</i> (6) - <i>Economic decrease</i> (6) - <i>Old age poverty</i> (1) <p>Democracy/Politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Direct democracy</i> (2) 	<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Cancel culture</i> (2) - <i>Gendered language</i> (2) - <i>Germany with one pure culture</i> (2) - <i>Culture of European states</i> (2) - <i>Traditional gender norms</i> (2) <p>Welfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Abuse/protection of social welfare system</i> (4) - <i>Economic decrease</i> (3) <p>Safety/Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Border security</i> (7) - <i>Close (economic relationship with Russia)</i> (1) - <i>Expand Nord stream</i> (1) - <i>Staying out of Ukraine war</i> (1) - <i>Supposed corruption</i> (2) <p>Climate Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Human-made climate change doesn't exist</i> (6) <p>Democracy/Politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Dexit</i> (47) - <i>Direct democracy</i> (2) - <i>EU is undemocratic</i> (2) - <i>Europe of national states</i> (43) - <i>Germany first</i> (6) - <i>Independent Germany</i> (12) - <i>Little national freedom</i> (7) - <i>No EU state</i> (2) - <i>Stopping Euro currency</i> (34) - <i>EU has too much power</i> (22) 	<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Cancel culture</i> (2) - <i>Russian values</i> (2) <p>Welfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Economic decrease</i> (2) <p>Safety/Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Close (economic) relationship with Russia</i> (21) - <i>Cutting sanctions</i> (6) - <i>Expand Nord stream</i> (3) - <i>Mandatory military service</i> (2) - <i>No arms deliveries</i> (24) - <i>Peace with Russia</i> (20) - <i>Respecting Putin</i> (4) - <i>Staying out of Ukraine war</i> (1) - <i>Strengthening Ger. Military</i> (4) - <i>Supposed corruption</i> (6) <p>Democracy/Politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Europe of national states</i> (2) - <i>Germany first</i> (6) - <i>Independent Germany</i> (13) - <i>Less influence of international organizations</i> (2)
Ingroup	<p>German citizens (31)</p> <p>People with German values, traditions (23)</p> <p>Integration willing Migrants (10)</p>	<p>Christians (4)</p> <p>German citizens (9)</p> <p>People with German values/ traditions (20)</p>	<p>German Citizens (6)</p> <p>Homeowners, tenants (8)</p> <p>Working class (2)</p>	<p>EU citizens (4)</p> <p>German citizens (3)</p> <p>People with German values/traditions (4)</p>	<p>German citizens (5)</p>
Outgroup	<p>Foreign cultures (35)</p> <p>Immigrants (56)</p> <p>Muslims (8)</p> <p>Non-ethnic Germans (12)</p> <p>Southern EU states (2)</p>	<p>Countries sabotaging Germany (2)</p> <p>Foreign cultures (10)</p> <p>Immigrants (6)</p> <p>Muslim states & influence (2)</p> <p>Muslims (20)</p> <p>Non-ethnic Germans (7)</p> <p>The Left/Green (12)</p> <p>Media (6)</p> <p>National Government (10)</p>	<p>Countries sabotaging Germany (4)</p>	<p>Foreign Cultures (2)</p> <p>Immigrants (10)</p> <p>Non-ethnic Germans (4)</p> <p>Southern EU states (16)</p>	
Elite	<p>European Union (8)</p> <p>Lobbyists (2)</p> <p>Media (6)</p> <p>Migration Industry (4)</p> <p>National Government (25)</p>		<p>European Union (2)</p> <p>The Lefts/Green (6)</p> <p>National Government (9)</p>	<p>Banks (4)</p> <p>European Union (37)</p> <p>The Left/Green (1)</p> <p>Media (1)</p> <p>National Government (10)</p>	<p>European Union (2)</p> <p>The Left/Green (2)</p> <p>Media (9)</p> <p>National Government (13)</p>

Immigration, Integration & Asylum

Issue Representation

In the quantitative analysis, the immigration topic was found to be the most important topic for the party at the start of 2024. This study found different issues that the party is addressing regarding this theme. The most significant issues were found in the groups of welfare of German citizens, safety and security, culture, and plans on how to deport migrants from Germany.

Table 2: Code Co-occurrence Issue Representation Migration

Issue	Code Amount
Abuse/Protection of social welfare system	20
Border Security	11
Cancel culture	8
Crime	14
Deporting	32
Direct democracy	2
Economic decrease	2
Europe of national states	2
Germany with one core culture	2
Integration	10
Labor market	6
Old age poverty	3

The issue of deporting was categorized as a separate group and was featured in both the manifesto and news articles whereby it was more often present in the articles. Passages frequently appeared like this: "*AfD leader Alice Weidel declared that she not only wanted to consistently deport foreigners, but also 'withdraw passports' from criminals, dangerous individuals, terrorists and rapists.*" (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 1.2.2024) This openly shows the plans of the party to deport not only foreigners but also people with German nationality. AfD politicians repeatedly emphasized their wish to deport immigrants from Germany. A different pattern could be seen for the issue that can be classified as the opposite of deportation, integration. This issue was featured exclusively in the party manifesto and included different

instances that would have to be met for migrants to be integrated, for example speaking the German language.

The concept of Welfare was the second most significant one, on which AfD predominantly warned of the threat of immigrants on the welfare system (i.e., protection or abuse of the social welfare system). More specifically, statements were made about migrants coming primarily to Germany to enjoy the social welfare state. Elena Roon stated, “*We have had a lot of immigrants since 2015, only a third go to work, the rest sit on our welfare system. We could make much better use of this money for our pensioners.*” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 5.2.2024) This quote also illustrates AfD’s division of an ingroup, ‘our pensioners’ and outgroups ‘immigrants in their statements.

For Safety and Security, crime, and border security were the two most prominent issues. These issues were reflected in both the party manifesto and news article, but the tone of voice differed. In the party manifesto, the AfD advocates for stricter control and closing EU borders to protect German citizens from crime. News articles mention the same issue, citing AfD politician Tim Krause: “*One had to ‘build a wall of steel on the water’ against migrants.*” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 7.8.2023) Based on this quote, the issue is discussed in a more emotionalizing way within the public discourse whereby making use of illustrative language. The quote additionally firmly states the group against whom the wall needs to be built establishing migrants as an opposing group.

Ingroup and Outgroup

The previous section gave some indication of how ingroups and outgroups are being used by the AfD, e.g., how a distinction was made between immigrants and German citizens. More specifically, three clear ingroups were referred to by the AfD, consisting of German citizens, people with German values or traditions, and migrants who are willing to integrate themselves. Although the first two ingroups are strongly related to each other, the AfD still makes a

distinction between them. This can partly be seen as the AfD refers to German citizens in a rather general, and overarching context, for instance when referring to protecting the social welfare system. The group of people that represents the German culture or share German values is often referred to by the AfD when cultural questions about the German identity emerge. An example of the view on values and identity is as follows, as Björn Höcke stated: *“We’, that is: ‘real members of the German people’, would ‘lose a few sections of the people’ in the future. Namely those who are ‘too weak or unwilling’ to resist ‘Africanization, Orientalization and Islamization (...).”* (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 6.3.2024) This quote shows how AfD distinguishes between “real” Germans and those who aren’t. Furthermore, a distinction is made between ‘strong real Germans’, the ones who protect German culture and values, and those who are not resisting cultural change, who are referred to as ‘the weak ones. Additionally, AfD uses words like “we” to directly address German citizens and appeal to them. This quote additionally refers to the issue of having a Germany that is populated with one (German) culture. The third ingroup, migrants who are willing to be integrated are not mentioned in the news articles and therefore do not play a role in the public discourse. Nevertheless, the party is referring to this group in the party manifesto stating criteria that would be necessary to achieve a successful integration like job qualifications, language skills, and a job offer. Due to the absent public discourse about this group, it can be seen as insignificant.

The outgroups that were referred to by the AfD include people from foreign cultures, non-ethnic Germans, Muslims, and immigrants. The group of immigrants was referred to most often and represented the most general group. Because it is so general, it was often mentioned in combination with issues that classified immigrants as the outgroup because of the issues being attached to them. This could especially be seen with the crime issue. One example of referring to crime as a cause of general immigration can be found in the party manifesto which stated: *“Millions of people from other cultural backgrounds (...) are being lured to Germany*

with false promises. (...) Disappointed hopes of prosperity harbor the danger that many will slip into crime.” Here, the connection between immigration and crime is made in a clear manner as well as referring to immigrants being brought to Germany by someone, which is not further clarified. Another issue related to immigration is deportation. This manner establishes migrants as an outgroup. Alice Weidel was cited advocating in favor of: *“Lowering the hurdles to withdrawing citizenship”* (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 1.2.2024) establishing the connection of this group and the issue in the public discourse including people with German citizenship as well into the outgroup referring to people from foreign cultures or non-ethnic Germans.

Especially Muslims or Islam, were regarded as another outgroup by the AfD. Although the party manifesto does not mention it in detail, it was found from statements in news articles such as this one: *“From the beginning, it (AfD) has openly denied that Islam is part of Germany in its election programs for the federal and state elections, (...).”* (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 21.3.2024) Because there were no statements in the party manifesto but in the articles exclusively, one can see that this particular group has played a significant role in the public discourse.

The two populist motives of Ingroups and Outgroups correlate within this topic. Often, ingroups identified by the AfD stand opposing towards the outgroups. The manifesto involved general statements about what groups to protect from other groups because of issues like crime or taxes. News articles often reported in detail about specific beliefs like repopulating Germany.

Elites

Within AfD’s statements on immigration, it can be seen that the national government of Germany was established as the main elite.

Table 3: Elites Migration

Elite	Code Amount
European Union	8
Lobbyists	2
Media	6
Migration Industry	4
National Government	25

The AfD accused the current national government of being responsible for the current migration 'crisis'. AfD also made a connection between the national government and a lack of national security, thereby emphasizing how the government isn't able to protect its citizens by not closing the borders. However, the claims went beyond the national government itself including the EU as a second elite in this topic. The EU was mentioned as controlling the national government and prohibiting independent action. This narrative can be underlined with the following quote from news media: *"The people's resistance to the puppet government in Berlin and its transatlantic string-pullers is growing."* (Die Zeit, 8.2.2024) The quote further states that this dependence on the EU would not be in the interest of the people, as well as the general decisions made by the national government.

Beyond the national government and the EU, the media and migration industry were mentioned as elites. The latter was referred to exclusively in the manifesto and claimed that there was a 'cartel-like' industry managing or controlling migration flows. In the articles, the media was accused of not reporting the parties' points. In the manifesto, the media were seen as prohibiting the deportation of immigrants, and not being an independent actor.

Culture, Language, and Identity

Issue Representation

The topic of Culture, Language, and Identity was categorized to be the second most important topic in the initial quantitative analysis. Two core issues were reflected in AfD's statements on this topic: German culture with foreign cultures, and language and gender. The first category is closely related to the topic of migration and refers to AfD's wish to create and preserve a German country with one pure culture and use the constitution to protect German values. Also

here, the party considers multiculturalism as “*a threat to the continuous existence of the nation*” (Party Manifesto). In the media, AfD pointed to forces threatening the German culture. For instance, in the following statement: “*The term 'race', which has quite rightly fallen into disrepute, has increasingly been replaced by the words 'culture' and 'cultural identity'. Those who were once discriminated against because of the color of their skin may now be considered 'culturally alien'*”. (Der Spiegel, 3.2.2024) This contributes to the German discourse around the party as thinking in racial stereotypes and takes the cultural divide created by the party as the reason for it. It explains the shift from talking about skin color to cultural identity. Therefore, the discourse is shaped by the party to include these narratives. Cultural issues were additionally related to the constitution because it was classified as a core part of German values, especially Islam and its values would be opposed to the German constitution. This will be investigated further in the outgroup section. As a consequence of both of the previous two issues, deporting is mentioned. Media outlets are reporting about deportation significantly often, which means that the issue pushed by the AfD has entered the public debate.

The second big category, language, and gender, includes issues like gendered language, traditional gender norms, traditional family and cancel culture. Especially gendered language is being rejected by the AfD. The party manifesto clearly defines this issue as follows: “*Domestically, the AfD is concerned to see how the German language is being replaced or 'gendered' by English in the sense of a misunderstood 'internationalization'. We firmly reject politically 'correct' language specifications*”. One can see how the party refers to it in the context of internationalization and defines the German language as part of the countries’ values. On the other hand, the issue of gendered language emerges rejecting change to the German language not only by international influence but in terms of gender, meaning changing words to include all genders. This shows that the general message that considers multiculturalism as a threat is applied across different issues including Language, but also general culture.

Closely linked to the previous is the issue of maintaining traditional gender norms are family structures, which are additional components of the parties' cultural visions. In this regard, the following quote by Maximilian Krah has reached a high level of attention in the public discourse: “(...) *Unmanly men and cool, career-fixated women are facing each other at a loss. The denial of masculinity as 'toxic' has now led to a third of young men being excluded from sex life and testosterone levels falling dangerously low. 'Right-wing politics affirms real masculinity and promotes spaces in which it can be learned and practiced - from soccer clubs to student fraternities (Die Zeit, 1.2.2024).*” Specifically promoting traditional values regarding masculinity, this AfD politician uses the issue to call out safe spaces for ‘real’ men. Whereas referring to women as “cool” and “career fixated” includes traditional gender norms as well.

Ingroup and Outgroup

Three Ingroups were found for this topic. These consist of Christians, German citizens, and people with German values. The party now specifically refers to Christianity as part of German values and defines it as one of the core features of German culture. It is therefore closely tied to the ingroup of people with German values and traditions, which marks the biggest ingroup of this topic. The issues of language or gender did not translate into separate ingroups. These were to an extent included in the ingroup of people with German values and traditions. The party makes use of ingroups primarily associated with cultural aspects in association with multiculturalism. It defined what values belong to Germany from their point of view. These are people who respect the Constitution and Christians.

More specific German values were not defined in this topic. But in the outgroup section, it became evident which values and groups are culturally foreign to Germany, from the AfD's point of view. These outgroups were Muslims, foreign cultures, non-ethnic Germans,

Immigrants, countries sabotaging Germany, and Muslim states and their influence on the country.

First, it is worth noting that these were more outgroups than for any other topic. Within this specific topic, Muslims were identified to be the most significant outgroup based on the frequency of coding. Statements in the party manifesto include that “*Islam does not belong to Germany. The AfD sees its expansion and the presence of a constantly growing number of Muslims as a major threat to our state, our society and our values.*” Also here, the word “threat” was used in association with Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, they are portrayed as expanding and growing in Germany which relates to repopulation narratives established earlier. This quote also labels traditional German values as ‘our’, referring to the ingroup of people with German values and traditions. At the same time, people who do not fit into these values are established as outsiders.

As previously indicated in the issue representation section, the party is connecting the issue of the constitutional state with the outgroup of Muslims. This becomes significant when referring to the Sharia and positioned against the constitution of Germany, like in the following quote from the party manifesto: “*The AfD clearly opposes Islamic religious practices that are directed against the free democratic basic order, (...). The legal provisions of Sharia law are incompatible with our legal system and with our values.*” Again, words like ‘our’ distinguish between the ingroup and the outgroup and position them against each other. In the last example, an issue was being used to make the connection between the two groups.

Elite

Elites were merely associated with the cultural factors that played a distinctive role within the ingroup and outgroup section. The three different elites were the media, the national government, and the Left/Green. The most significant elite was the Left/Green, which was especially connected to the issues of multiculturalism. It appeared in quotes like the following,

which were purely included in the news media: “*The enemy today,' writes Gauland, 'is not Marxist socialism, but woke left-liberalism'. The one-world ideology of the liberal elites is destroying the life contexts and traditions of established communities and, in the end, humanity itself.*” (Die Zeit, 1.2.2024) One can see a depiction of the left or “woke” people not only as elites but also as direct enemies of people and cultural concepts like traditions. This quote therefore displays a clear anti-elitism motive. Additionally, multiculturalism is not only described as a threat anymore but categorized beyond that as destroying humanity as a whole. It would come so, because of a decreased national identity, which means that national values and traditions are seen as endangered by the Left.

However, in general, one must say that for this topic, elites were not as clearly recognizable as enemies of the people for every aspect and every issue. No elite was found relating to Muslims as the biggest outgroup. The same was the case for gender roles or German language. Although one could say that it might be included within the Left/Green or woke elite, it was never directly mentioned. For the other two elites, national government and media, there was no clear pattern was visible either. The party does talk about the media as an elite and that especially the federal broadcasting system would need reformative measures, but it does not connect them to any issue or group within this topic. Therefore, the media was mentioned in general, but not specifically associated with for example gendered language. This was the case for both, articles and manifesto. The national government also was not mentioned in any specific context but in association with the other established parties. This connection was often made to present the AfD as the only viable alternative to those parties.

Energy Transition

Issue Representation

For this topic, the only meaningful issue categories included were climate change and welfare. Most significant issues based on the coding were identified to be rejecting renewable energy,

energy prices, non-effective renewables, and nuclear energy, as well as economic decrease and personal freedom. The last two issues belong to the category of welfare.

The most frequently found individual issue was energy prices. Here, the party points out that the energy transition would lead to higher energy prices for the citizens. In the news articles, this issue was closely connected to the claim of returning to nuclear power like in this quote: *“Since Germany's withdrawal from nuclear power last year (...) the right-wing populist AfD has been calling for a return to nuclear power. They argue that this could improve security of supply and lower prices.”* (Stern, 7.3.2024) This marks an example of issues overlapping or being used together to generate a solution or argumentation in line with the parties' claims. While nuclear power is connected to energy prices in the public discourse, the party itself frequently connects this issue to the renewable energy law in the manifesto. There it is suggested that the law would be the reason for the high prices. *“The EEG (renewable energy law) and the energy transition are jeopardizing the electricity supply. For this reason, they are driving up the price of electricity.”* In this quote, the party also additionally refers to renewable energy as being more unstable and may lead to irritations in supply. Here, one could see how the party is connecting different issues to a claim thereby influencing the discussion with mixed argumentation.

Almost equally significant issues involved generally rejecting renewables, like: *“Wind turbines destroy the image of our cultural landscapes and are also a deadly danger for birds.”* (party manifesto) or labeling them as not as effective as the traditional energy sources. The latter was referred to as one further reason why the party does not want to engage in renewable energy. For a different reason, the AfD declines the existence of human-made climate change as a whole *“Co-party leader Tino Chrupalla spoke of 'climate hysteria' on the sidelines of the party conference. 'Nothing will happen if the earth is 1.5 degrees warmer.'”* (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 7.8.2023) This quote appeared in the news media and characterized how the party

positions itself outside of the climate debate by rejecting its existence or neglecting consequences. Making use of words like “hysteria” additionally emotionalizes the claim.

While rejecting renewables as a whole, the party also connected this issue to economic decrease and lower personal freedom of citizens through higher prices. This is being picked up in the news media by citing politicians of the AfD, but clearest it was defined in the party manifesto in ways like this: “*personal and economic freedom is massively restricted. The planned compulsory reduction of CO2 emissions by more than 85 percent would weaken the business location and lower the standard of living.*” Based on this quote, the party referred to a conflict between reducing emissions and the economic welfare of the country. This line of argumentation serves as another reason why renewable energy is not desirable for the party. Addressing this, the party once again made use of mixing different issues that even stem from different issue categories, like economic welfare and climate change. In the news media, this was connected to elites that would stand across the citizens, for this reason, it will be explained more extensively there.

Ingroup and Outgroup

First of all, one must recognize that this topic did not include as many in-and outgroups as the previous two topics. Only one outgroup and three ingroups were identified. The outgroup was countries sabotaging Germany and the ingroups included German citizens, homeowners/tenants, and the working class.

The AfD refers to homeowners and tenants who would have to pay increasingly more when it comes to modifying their houses for the energy transition. Especially heating systems were a significant topic in the public discourse. It was referred to by reciting AfD slogans like “*No heating system is illegal.*” (Stern, 21.6.2023) One can see the focus on heating systems, as well as homeowners who are to be protected from making changes

An outgroup that appeared within this topic specifically was countries sabotaging Germany. This outgroup was not referred to significantly often, but it is still important to note because it does not stand across the ingroup as was the case for the previous topics. The outgroup was created in the context of energy transition which would pose an opportunity for other countries to sabotage Germany during the energy transition. Party leader Tino Chrupalla additionally included the question “*Is the energy transition being controlled by foreign power and capital interests?*” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 31.5.2024) This shows that the AfD is suggesting that the energy transition would be controlled by powers or interests from foreign countries. When looking at both, ingroups and outgroups. It becomes apparent that both are very different. The outgroup is considered to be foreign forces but the ingroup is homeowners and citizens. It has not become clear that the party has positioned them across from each other which is the case for the first time so far.

Elite

Three different elites were identified for this topic. National government, which appeared most often, followed by the Left/Green, and the EU. All of these were communicated to be opposing German citizens, and other ingroups that had been established earlier for this topic. Especially, the national government and Green/Left were described as being unrightfully involved in people’s affairs. An example of that is this quote: “*The state should not be caring about what people use to heat their homes, what they eat, where they fly to on vacation and how often or how they organize their mobility,’ said AfD MP Ansgar Schledde.*” (Stern, 21.6.2024) Significantly, heating plays a role again as something important to the ordinary citizen. Generally, the politician lists personal things and suggests that these would be controlled by the state and therefore the governmental elite. However, the elite narrative goes beyond the national level and also addresses the European Union: “*(...) Guido Reil, criticized the Social Climate Fund as ‘an indirect admission that the EU’s climate policy is an elite project that*

places a greater burden on the weaker and poorer members of society in particular.’’ (Stern, 18.4.2023) In this quote, the word elite is used specifically labeling the EU as such. It marks a rare time when politicians directly used this word while talking about elites. Furthermore, the less wealthy people in society are directly addressed as negatively impacted by the EU.

European Union

Issue representation

More issues appeared in combination with the EU than was the case for any other topic. 25 different issues were addressed in the party manifesto or news articles, but most were covered in the articles. Although this topic showed a large variety of different issues, four had significantly more appearances than others. These biggest issues were Dexit, which means Germany leaving the EU, Europe of national states, which means a reformation of the EU to strengthen the independence of national states, stopping the Euro currency, and too much power lies within the EU.

Table 4: Issues European Union

Issue	Code Amount
Abuse/Protection of social welfare system	4
Border Security	7
Cancel culture	2
Close relationship with Russia	1
Deporting	2
Dexit	47
Direct democracy	2
Economic decrease	3
EU is undemocratic	2
Europe of national states	43
Expand nordstream	1
Gendered language	1
Germany first	6
Germany with one pure culture	2
Climate change doesn't exist	4
Independent Germany	12
National Freedom	7
No EU state	2
No renewable energy	6
Staying out of Ukraine war	1
Stopping EURO currency	34
Supposed corruption	2
EU has too much power	22
Traditional gender norms	2

After analyzing the data, it became apparent that the main objective is to reform the EU to increase the independence of national states. If this would not be achievable, Germany should leave the EU completely. This is what the party manifesto states in the following words: *“If our fundamental reform approaches cannot be realized in the existing EU system, we will strive for Germany's withdrawal or a democratic dissolution of the European Union (...).”* The quote underlines the will to leave the EU or effectively end it completely.

In the public discourse, however, newspaper articles did not always explain this complete demand and rather focused on the EU exit itself or elaborate on what consequences

such a decision would have for Germany. Therefore, the party successfully translated its main issue into the public discourse. Furthermore, the claim of reforming the EU to a collective of national states is often just described as leaving the EU and so, this remains the main issue of the public discourse as can be seen in this excerpt: *“A draft published in June sets the goal of an 'orderly dissolution of the EU' and the establishment of a 'new European economic and interest community'. Some AfD representatives are calling for Germany to leave the EU, known as Dexit.”* (Stern, 5.8.2023) Quotes like these mention the issue of a reformation but still include the so-called Dexit as the main issue, which ended up dominating the discourse.

The next biggest issue was stopping the Euro currency and reintroducing the German Mark. In the public discourse, no direct reasons were mentioned by the party that supports the claim. Instead, general demands were featured referring to the general end of the Euro in Germany. The party manifesto gives more insight: *“The legacy of Europe's history is the democratic constitutional state and the peaceful coexistence of sovereign states. The installation of the euro currency area is likely to destroy these cultural achievements. To prevent this, this reckless experiment must be stopped immediately.”* In this passage, the party ties the currency to cultural elements and refers to it as a threat to peaceful coexistence between European nations. For the party, the Euro is taking away the cultural differences of countries. Additionally, the party underlines this claim by using attributes like ‘reckless’ or ‘destroy’ to underline the urgency.

Further issues are closely related to the aforementioned ones. Examples of this are: the EU has too much power, no national independence, and Germany first. However, these were so closely related that they will not be explained in detail for this topic. In total, issues from every category were covered ranging from culture to security. Issues like border security, which had previously been introduced were elevated from a national level to an EU level but included the same talking points. The same was the case for rejecting renewable energies.

Ingroup and Outgroup

For the topic of the EU, ingroups and outgroups emerged that covered different concepts. Firstly, the concept of immigration and culture included the ingroups of German citizens and people with German values. The outgroups for these concepts were people with foreign cultures, immigrants, and non-ethnic Germans. Other concepts included critique towards the EU as a whole and included the outgroup of southern EU states.

The ingroups of people with German values and traditions were connected to the issue of border security. This was exclusively found in the news articles and the party referred to border security in the following ways quoting René Aust: “(...) *the 36-year-old called for Europe to be turned into a ‘fortress’ against immigration. ‘Our European civilization is in danger from mass immigration,’ said Aust. He issued a warning to people from Africa wishing to immigrate: ‘You will not make this continent your home.’*” (Stern, 30.8.2023) It is apparent that this politician is making use of narratives that feature words like ‘us’ and directly addressing the people to whom the continent “belongs” in his opinion. Additionally, emotions of threat are evoked as he classifies immigrants as dangerous to European cultures and beyond that, the entire civilization. Protection of the ingroup is a feature of this quote too, as the fortress should protect the citizens of Europe whereby addressing the ingroup. In general, from this quote, it became clear that the AfD is driving a narrative where immigrants would not be welcome in Europe.

The next category, which ingroups and outgroups were formed around, goes beyond the cultural and immigration claims. Instead, it includes narratives that criticize the existence of the EU as a whole. Going into greater detail, southern EU states have been identified as the next biggest outgroup. According to the AfD, the EU would be falling because these countries are being characterized as dependent on stronger economic nations like Germany. The party referred to this relationship between economically stronger and weaker states as “*giving countries*” and “*taking countries*” mentioning the weaker economic nations as disadvantageous

to the stronger. Compared with the previous category of cultural issues, groups from this category were featured in the party manifesto exclusively.

Elite

The anti-EU narratives that were already established in the issue representation and outgroup section were also the most significant when investigating different elites for this topic. This was the case because by far the most significant elite was the EU itself. It was described as having features of paternalism, globalism, and lobbyism that would not be in line with the interests of citizens.

Table 5: Elites EU

Elite	Code Amount
Banks	4
European Union	37
The Left/Green	1
Media	1
National Government	10

In general, this quote from the party manifesto summarizes the previous claims. *“Over the years, the European Union has acquired competencies for which there is no basis in the European treaties.”* It is claiming that the EU would hold too much power and is exaggerating its influence beyond boundaries. Statements in the news articles include a different tone e.g. by Maximilian Krah *“(…) against the EU, against Brussels bureaucrats, against immigration.’ You get percentages for that).”* (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 31.7.2023) This quote shows that the EU was deliberately established as an elite, in the interest of voter support. Also, this specific quote did not include issues that were presented earlier but categorizes the EU as an opposing entity in a general sense.

Other quotes however did include connections to issues and the EU as an elite. Especially the Euro currency was mentioned in that sense, as well as the goal of a Europe of more national states.

External Policy and Russia

Issue Representation

For the topic of Russia and external policy, three main issues of the AfD were identified. These are a close (economic) relationship with Russia, no arms deliveries to Ukraine, and peace with Russia. Less important issues were independent Germany, which included statements against globalism, and cutting sanctions.

Table 6: Issues Russia

Issues	Code Amount
Cancel Culture	2
Close relationship with Russia	21
Cutting sanctions	6
Economic decrease	2
Europe of national states	2
Expand nordstream	2
Germany first	6
Independent Germany	13
Mandatory military service	2
No arms deliveries	24
Peace with Russia	20
Respecting Putin	4
Russian values	2
Saying out of war	1
Strengthening the military	4
Supposed corruption	6

The issues were closely linked to the main goal which was to normalize the relationship with Russia. One can see the demands most clearly when investigating quotes on the issue of no arms deliveries, which appeared most significantly in the public discourse. In news media,

their position has been referred to as follows: *“For Ukraine, the party is calling for a negotiated solution and a stop to German arms deliveries (...). In the AfD's view, arms deliveries only prolong the war.”* (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 16.4.2024) In this quote, the issues of peace with Russia and no arms deliveries are closely related to each other. The party referred to both issues in the same context and used a narrative where one would need the one issue, no arms deliveries, to achieve the other, peace with Russia. It also relates arms deliveries to a longer war.

Beyond the claims of no arms deliveries and peace with Russia, the party also advocated for a generally closer relationship with the country, as Björn Höcke was quoted in the following way seeking *'solidarity with Russia'* (...). *'Together,' he added, quoting Vladimir Putin, 'we would be unbeatable'.* (Die Zeit, 11.4.2024) This showed the goal of this politician to not only work closely together with Russia but also work alongside its leader. Still, the discourse is not shaped by opinions like this alone, as other party members are quoted: *“That has completely turned around. Putin's friends have become increasingly important. Just look at the current Federal Executive Board.”* Therefore, different opinions on the matter were featured in the discourse, however, the previous claims by Höcke were dominant, as was also shown by the significant number of appearances on the issue.

Ingroup and Outgroup

This topic holds the least groups of any kind compared to the other topics. Only one ingroup and no outgroups emerged with the ingroup being German citizens. The party often tied German citizens to its claims of having a closer relationship with Russia as German people would gain from that. Specific benefits were not mentioned as quotes frequently appeared like this: *“Tino Chrupalla (...) told dpa: 'As a constitutional party, the Alternative for Germany stands for a sovereign national and European policy in the interests of Germany and its citizens.' The cornerstones of this are peace and good relations with other countries, especially*

countries on the European continent, such as Russia.” (Stern, 6.4.2024) The interests of German citizens were underlined and equated with a prosperous and peaceful European continent. Additionally, Russia is mentioned specifically in this sense including it to the goals of peace. It underlined the strive for a closer relationship with that country.

Elite

For this topic, elites were identified who oppose the parties’ issues connected to Russia or the war. Especially the German government was characterized as an elite by the party in this context. The party frequently labeled the government as “*warmongers*” (BILD, 19.3.2024), as Germany frequently sent weapons to Ukraine. Not only in the context of weapons but words like these were also used addressing the sanctions and economic distancing from Russia, Alice Weidel was cited: “*In fact, Germany is acting like a warring party'. It is participating in an 'economic war against Russia' through the sanctions.*” (Stern, 20.3.2024) Based on this quote it is evident that the party sees the policies of the government as opposing to their views. The choice of words is particularly influencing the public debate as it not only characterizes the national government as disadvantageous to the entire country, but actively engaging in a war. Tying ‘warmongers’ to different issues contributes to this narrative dominating the discourse.

A second significant elite was the media. This finding was particularly evident when analyzing responses from politicians affiliated with the AfD being questioned about alleged corrupt practices linked to Russia. In this context, the media is frequently mentioned as the initiator of a “*defamation campaign*” (Stern, 3.4.2024). This referred to the media directly, but also to the national government which would be behind the campaigns. The narrative of the media not being independent can also be found in this quote by Peter Bystron: “*Anyone who stands up for peace and against the continuation of the war in Ukraine should be defamed as a Russian agent.*” (Stern 4.4.2024) It is still the case that, in the quotes by or about the AfD,

the media was not referred to in connection with any of the ingroups. However, it is still the case that the main issues for this topic are represented in the quotes that include elite messages.

Discussion and conclusion

This section discusses key findings with the research question which was presented in the introduction. Findings are interpreted based on previously established literature on the matter of right-wing populist communication and their effect on public discourse, and first discuss populist content after which is followed by populist communication style. This section will be followed by an interpretation of how this study contributes to the theoretical field and how the findings can be applied in practice. Furthermore, this study will be looked at in a critical way examining possible limitations and how future research can continue research into this field.

Main findings - The AfD's populist motives in practice over different topics

The analysis revealed that the populist communication style is used by the AfD across all popular topics that were investigated, including Migration, Energy Transition, and the EU. These findings expand previous research for instance by Arzheimer and Berning (2019), who already stated that this was the case for the migration topic. As the first part of the research question explores the extent to which populist tendencies are used, it is vital to first establish that they were indeed present. However, it must be said that the usage of populist tendencies, narratives, and motives differed among topics. This will be discussed further as the research question too aimed at investigating the ways these populist motives are being used.

The following is taken up by anti-elitism messages first. As was first defined by Mudde (2004), establishing elites and opposing them against the homogenous entity of 'the people', is the cornerstone of the populist definition. The AfD made use of these anti-elitism motives, although, some topics featured greater use of this motive than others, and not all of them included the elitism message in the way that Mudde (2004) defined it. The topics of Energy

transition, EU, and External policy featured these narratives in a way that was included in the prominent definition, but it also means that the elite was referred to differently among other topics. Especially the topics Migration and, Language, Culture, and Identity did not play out the people against the elite. Here, the elite was mainly connected to specific issues. For example, the party connected the elites to the immigration issue, which would not be handled adequately by the national government. This study's findings therefore go beyond Mudde's (2004) definition of playing out the people against the elites, as elites can also be directly connected to specific issues of the party. However, they still suggest the use of anti-elite populism, which is in line with the definition of Jagers and Walgrave (2007). Furthermore, elites were previously categorized as posing an end to the pure people (Hameleers et al., 2018). However, this does not align with the analysis. Even for the topics that strongly included anti-elitism messages like Energy Transition, the elite was not referred to as ending the existence of the people. Instead, they were connected to issues like multiculturalism, which in turn could lead to an end of the people's values or even society, but elites themselves were never referred to in that way.

The pattern of variation across different topics continues when examining the motive of using ingroups and outgroups. For some topics, the party strongly used the motive of distinguishing between ingroups and outgroups. This was especially the case for the topic of migration and Culture, Language, and Identity. Here, people with German values or traditions were positioned in an opposing way towards people from foreign cultures or immigrants. This aligns with Hameleers et al. (2018), who found far-right populist parties use ingroup and outgroup narratives for the immigration topic, positioning migrants across from the "real" citizens of the country. This study adds to this finding by demonstrating the AfD's usage of this motive for all cultural topics. Mudde's (2004) concept of nativism was also featured as strong nationalist and xenophobe sentiments were included in the messages by the party referring to

the outgroup of immigrants. Therefore, the party made use of ingroup-outgroup populism defined by Fawzi (2018), while connecting it with nativism, at least for cultural, and immigration topics. On the contrary, the topics Energy Transition and External Policy and Russia did not feature this populist motive in a significant way. It was apparent that topics with stronger elitism messages featured fewer messages concerning ingroups and outgroups, suggesting that an overlap of anti-elite populism and ingroup-outgroups populism is possible, but they might strategically emphasize one over the other depending on the topic.

This research did not only aim to lay out the usage of populist motives but also how populist communication is being used to influence the public discourse. This was done by deliberately mentioning some issues significantly more than others. In this way, the AfD could push deportation narratives over, for example, integration messages. This serves as an example of populist agenda setting as the party deliberately uses these issues more to generate more exposure for them, which might lead to an increasing agreement for them in society (Schmidt, 2023). This was not only the case for the immigration topic but could also be seen within the topic of the EU, where leaving the EU was featured most often and therefore contributed to dominating the public debate. How these issues were presented often included stark language which Wodak (2014) described is often the case for far-right populist parties. Although one could generally expect this finding, the colorful language was specifically connected to the outgroups or elites, drawing an 'us versus them' narrative. Thus, the populist motives in each topic were not only underlined but reinforced by emotionalizing the divide with emotions like fear or anger. This means breaching norms of language use is done intentionally to address the opposing entities of the party. Because these scandalizing messages attract attention, the content can not only be reinforced into the public discourse but might influence society as a whole long term. Brown and Mondon (2020) described this too for the issue of racism. For the AfD, several issues add to that, for example, distrust of the national government, or Muslims

not belonging to Germany. In contrast to that, the party manifesto neither includes stark expressions nor breaches the norms of the public debate, however, the ideological viewpoints are the same that were addressed in the public discourse; therefore, the content did strongly overlap, but the style of communication differed strongly.

Theoretical and practical contributions

Populism was already defined in different ways and described from different perspectives, such as content, communication style, or communication phenomenon. It was also regarded as complete or empty populism dependent on what populist motives are included in the communication (De Vreese et al., 2018; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). Moreover, research specifically indicated the need to analyze the “definition of ‘the people’, the articulation of the corrupt elite, and the choice of out-groups” (De Vreese et al., 2018, p. 432). This is part of what this study investigated while going beyond that and applying this to ways of communication style and different topics. Looking at the findings of this study, one should not view populism as a full entity with different degrees, but as something that can be adapted, changed, or assimilated based on the topic it is used for. Consequently, populism should be seen as topic-specific, acknowledging different issues within them, instead of defining and investigating it as a complete concept. Brown and Mondon (2020) criticized the same issue, describing political parties only as populist does not encompass the full scale and ignores attributes such as emotional or racist speech. Beyond these statements, this study indicated that it also doesn’t include differences for each different topic. However, looking at individual topics is crucial, as populist agenda-setting states that individual topics are pushed into the societal discourse and not the populist party as a whole. It is therefore individual topics that shape people’s perceptions and research should look into the causes and ways behind this process. Because of that, this study contributes to existing research by proposing to investigate populism from this topic-based perspective.

This also translates to practical implications. When the media is reporting about parties labeled as populist, it could be included why this is the case. Including the explanation about different populist motives in the coverage could lead to a better understanding of populist parties among the public and uncover the chameleonlike use of populist motives by the AfD. Furthermore, opposing political parties could be encouraged to spread counter-narratives for the topics that the AfD is pushing while emphasizing positivity over emotionalization like fear and pointing out the differences within the lines of argumentation.

Limitations and future research

Since this study aimed to examine the ways of communication in association with populist narratives across different topics, it could not encompass a systemic approach to the number and frequency of use of populist motives. Future studies could quantitatively look at this and not limit themselves to a party of just one country. This can result in future research looking at parties from different countries and how they use populist communication across different topics. It could aim for a complete framework of different topics and issues that are tied to populism; this should also include what specific populist motives were used within the topics. Therefore, a lens of comparative populist communication since all countries are making use of their topics and issues. It can contribute to a better understanding of populist parties and how different topics are being addressed in a populist manner across different countries.

Furthermore, this study was not performed before a major election, and additionally used the basic party manifesto instead of an election program. Additionally, this study took part after a major phase of public awareness of the party, it could be that the topics were therefore talked about differently than in stable times. Especially the migration topic, which was center of the public outrage could have been affected by this.

Conclusion

This study explored the ways of using of populist communication style by the AfD among different topics. The qualitative analysis of news articles revealed that the use of populist motives differed across topics. While all topics featured populist motives, the AfD distinguished between them in terms of use. The party was able to influence the public discourse with its topics and narratives by applying various prominent populist communication techniques such as highlighting specific issues or using emotional language, all while making use of populist motives, creating ingroups, outgroups, and anti-elitist messages.

The findings of this study suggest looking at populism topic-based to delve deeper into the actual methods of how it is used in practice. This research does not reject the previous definitions aiming to give an all-encompassing view on the matter but indicates that research should go beyond that and investigate the motives used for different topics. Therefore, future research could lay out a comparative framework of populist topics and the motives that are used within them, aiming to reach a phase where populist parties across different countries become comparable.

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Appendices

During the preparation of this work the author used ChatGPT to find synonyms for words to be used in the different search strings, DeepL to translate the quotes and other matters needing translation, Gemini to rephrase some parts of the discussion section. For the other sections no rephrasing tools were used. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

Appendix 1: Codebook

Code	Subcode	Definition	Example
1. Type of source	1.1 Party Manifesto		
	1.2 News Articles		
2. Topic	2.1 Immigration, Integration & Asylum	Used to mark the entire document for this topic	
	2.2 Culture, Language, Identity	“	
	2.3 Energy Transition	“	
	2.4 European Union	“	
	2.5 External Policy and Russia	“	
3. Issue representation	3.1 Culture	Statements about any kind of cultural issues predominantly within Germany and Europe. Specific sub-issues included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cancel culture - Germany with one pure culture - German History - Integration 	“Against mass immigration, Islamization and multiculturalism, they would prefer the peoples to live separately in their own countries according to ethnopluralism.”
	3.2 Democracy/Politics	Statements on how Germany is positioning itself within the EU's	"The euro is damaging the great good of peaceful coexistence

<p>democratic processes Including these sub-issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dexit (Germany leaving EU) - Stopping EURO currency - EU has too much power - Direct democracy - Europe of national states - Independent Germany - Germany first 	<p>between the peoples that the eurocracy has forced into this fateful community."</p>
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3.3 Welfare

<p>Statements about personal/economic welfare and freedom of Germans, the labor market situation, social system</p>	<p>"The AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag has accused the government of "ruining the country."</p>
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3.4 Safety/Security

<p>Statements about the internal and external safety of Germany and statements related to the Russia or Ukraine war. With sub-issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peace with Russia - Putin is respectable 	<p>"The party demands a negotiated solution for Ukraine and a stop to German arms deliveries"</p>
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- Supposed corruption
- Strengthening military
- No arms deliveries
- Expand Nord stream

3.5 Climate Change

Issues related to climate change or renewable energies and their supposed consequences.

"Co-party leader Tino Chrupalla spoke of 'climate hysteria' on the fringes of the party conference. Nothing will happen 'if the earth is 1.5 degrees warmer'."

3.6 Deporting

Statements about deporting people from Germany

"AfD leader Alice Weidel declared that she not only wanted to consistently deport foreigners, but also 'withdraw passports' from criminals, dangerous individuals, terrorists and rapists."

4. Ingroup

4.1 Christians

Christianity as a central part of German culture

"We want to permanently preserve (...) our Western Christian culture, our language and tradition in a peaceful, democratic and sovereign nation state of the German people."

4.2 German citizens	References to the German people	“Our goal is a sovereign Germany that guarantees the freedom and security of its citizens, promotes their prosperity and contributes to a peaceful and prosperous Europe.”
4.3 People with German values/Traditions	People with these characteristics are important to the party	“Instead, the AfD proposes that more children be born. According to the parliamentary group's ten-point plan, those 'with German citizenship and an actual center of life in Germany'.”
4.4 Homeowners & Tenants	Homeowners and tenants are to be protected	“EnEV are leading to a rapid increase in construction costs and serve as a justification for luxury renovations. As a result, the rents of many apartments are barely affordable for people with medium and low incomes.”
4.5 Integration willing migrants	Statements about migrants willing to be integrated to be included in society	“We welcome immigrants who are qualified for the labor

			market and are willing to integrate.”
5. Outgroup	5.1 Countries sabotaging Germany	Statement about Germany being influenced or controlled by foreign entities	"Is the energy transition controlled by foreign power and capital interests?"
	5.2 People of foreign cultures	Statements about people from foreign cultures not belonging to Germany	"The ideology of multiculturalism, which equates imported cultural currents with the native culture in a historically blind way and thus deeply relativizes its values, is seen by the AfD as a serious threat to social peace and the continued existence of the nation as a cultural entity."
	5.3 Immigrants	Statements about immigrants being disadvantageous for Germany.	"Making Europe a 'fortress' against immigration. 'Our European civilization is in danger due to mass immigration'."
	5.4 Muslim states and their influence	Islamic states want to increase their power by influencing German entities.	"Islamic states want to spread Islam in Germany and increase their power by building and operating mosques.”
	5.5 Muslims	Statements about Muslims or the Islam	"Islam does not belong to Germany.”

		not being part of Germany.	
	5.6 Non-ethnic Germans	Statements distinguishing 'pure' Germans from non-ethnic Germans	"Thinking of a 'homogeneous' culture, a 'natural' family, a 'pure' nation."
	5.7 Southern EU states	Statements about southern EU states taking money from the stronger economic nations	"Efficient states (like Germany) should pay even pay even more for the political misconduct of other EU countries"
6. Elites	6.1 Banks	Banks being detached from the people	The "banking union", like the concentration of banking supervision at the ECB is a further step towards a liability and transfer union over and above the liability mechanisms already in place in the monetary union.
	6.2 European Union	European union is characterized as an elite thus acting like it is opposing the will of the people.	"The EU is considered 'unreformable'."
	6.3 The Left/Green	The Green/Left is characterized as an elite thus acting like it is opposing the will of the people.	"Alliance of the global propertied bourgeoisie' with left-liberal elites who no longer recognize identity and

6.4 Lobbyists	Lobbyists are characterized as an elite thus acting like it is opposing the will of the people.	'hate the people', the greatest enemy." Campaigns by the immigration lobby and media aim for ever new rights to stay
6.5 Media	The media is characterized as not reporting the truth or being part of campaigns.	The rest of Weidel's letter exhausts itself in conspiracy ideological insinuations that Correctiv is running a government-controlled campaign against the AfD with deceitful comparisons, dramatizations and lies.
6.6 Migration Industry	Migration industry is characterized as an elite thus acting like it is opposing the will of the people.	In the wake of mass immigration, a cartel-like migration industry has emerged that dictates prices in many places.
6.7 National Government	National government characterized as an elite thus acting like it is opposing the will of the people.	"The state must not worry about what people use to heat their homes, what they eat, where they fly to on vacation and how often or how they organize their mobility"

Appendix 2: Search log

Date	Database	Search String	Number of Hits	Relevant Hits
13. March 2024	Web of Science	("populism" OR "populists" OR "right wing populism") AND ("reasons to vote" OR "support" OR "voting reasons" OR "central topics" OR "voting behaviour") AND ("public discourse" OR "public debate" OR "media coverage" OR "role of media" OR "traditional media")	50	13
13. March 2024	Web of Science	("populism" OR "populist" OR "populist parties") AND ("voting behavior" OR "electoral choice" OR "party support") AND ("media portrayal" OR "media representation" OR "role of media" OR "media coverage" OR "role of media" OR "traditional media") AND ("political discourse" OR "public discourse" OR "societal discourse" OR "public debate" OR "political debate") OR ("prominent	32885	4

		topics” OR “key issues” OR “key topics” OR “central ideas” OR “reasons to vote”)		
14. March 2024	Web of Science	("populism" OR "populists" OR "right wing populism") AND ("reasons to vote" OR "support" OR "voting reasons" OR "central topics" OR "voting behaviour") AND ("public discourse" OR "public debate" OR "media coverage" OR "role of media" OR "traditional media")	33	8
14. March 2024	Web of Science	(“populism” OR “populist”) AND (“public discourse” OR “civic conversation2 OR “public dialogue” OR “societal discussion” OR 2national conversation” OR “public debate” OR “discourse in the public sphere” OR “community deliberation” OR “open discussion” OR “conversations in the public realm”) AND (“media” OR “press” OR “news outlets” OR “journalism” OR “mass communication” OR “information dissemination” OR “news media” OR	54	10

		“broadcasting” OR “communication channels” OR “public information sources”)		
26. March 2024	Web of Science	("public discourse" OR "societal discourse" OR "political discourse") AND ("populist parties" OR "far right" OR "radical parties" OR "extreme" OR "right wing" OR "populism")	622	30
26. March	Web of Science	("public discourse" OR "societal discourse" OR "political discourse") AND ("populist parties" OR "far right" OR "radical parties" OR "extreme" OR "right wing" OR "populism")	290	12
18. March	Google Scholar	(“populism” OR “populist” OR “populist parties”) AND (“voting behavior” OR “electoral choice” OR “party support”) AND (“media portrayal” OR “media representation” OR “role of media” OR “media coverage” OR “role of media” OR “traditional media” OR “political discourse” OR “public discourse” OR “societal discourse” OR “public debate” OR “political	10900	2

4. April 2024	Google Scholar	debate" OR "prominent topics" OR "key issues" OR "key topics" OR "central ideas" OR "reasons to vote") ("topic modelling" OR "content analysis" OR "topic analysis") AND ("populist parties" OR "party manifestos" OR "manifestos" OR "populist topics")	15700	3
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Appendix 3: Search log Nexis Uni

Date	Database	Search String	Number of Hits	Relevant Hits	Filters
26. April 2024	Nexis Uni	"AfD" OR "AfD Politiker" OR "Politiker" OR "politiciants" OR "populistisch" OR "radikal" OR "far right" OR "rechtsaußen" OR "rechtsextrem" OR "rechtspopulistisch" AND "migration" OR "immigration" OR "Flüchtlinge" OR "Muslime" OR "Ausländer"	402	35	Sources: Stern,BILD , Süddeutsche Zeitung, taz, Der Tagesspiegel, Die ZEIT, Der Spiegel, B. Z., Language: German; Time Frame: Feb 01, 2024 an 2024

9. May 2024	Nexis Uni	"gender" OR "Sprache" OR "Identität" OR "Kultur" OR "deutsche Kultur" OR " DeutscheWerte" OR "Gender mainstream" OR "Islam" OR "Multikulturalismus" OR "Islamkritik" OR "Moschee" OR "Rundfunk" OR "Medienpolitik" AND "AfD" OR "Alternative für Deutschland" OR "Weidel" OR "Chrupalla" OR "AfD narrative" OR "Populismus" OR "Rechtspopulist" OR "rechtsradikal" OR "Parteiprogramm"	332	32	“
14. May 2024	Nexis Uni	"Erneuerbare Energien" OR "Energiewende" OR "Klimawandel" OR "Fossile Energien" OR "Atomkraft" OR "Fracking" OR "Solar" OR "Windkraft" OR "EEG- Umlage" OR "Co2" OR "Erderwärmung" OR "Dekarbonisierung" OR "Emissionen" AND "AfD" OR "Alternative für Deutschland" OR "Weidel" OR "Chrupalla" OR "Populismus" OR "Rechtspopulismus" OR "Rechtsradikal" OR "AfD Politiker"	415	24	“
18. May 2024		"Europäische Union" OR "EU" OR "Anti EU" OR	1409	22	“

	"Subventionen" OR "EU" OR			
	"Gesetze" OR "Brüssel" OR			
	"Euro" AND "AfD" OR			
	"Alternative für Deutschland"			
	OR "Weidel" OR "Chrupalla"			
	OR "Populismus" OR			
	"Rechtspopulismus" OR "rechte			
	Partei" OR "Höcke" OR			
	"radikal"			
17. May	"Ukraine" OR "Russland" OR	603	28	“
2024	"Angriffskrieg" OR "Krieg" OR			
	"Sanktionen" OR "Ukrainehilfe"			
	OR "Ukrainer" OR "Waffen" OR			
	"Waffenlieferungen" OR "Putin"			
	OR "Nato" OR			
	"Landesverteidigung" OR			
	"Bundeswehr" AND "AfD" OR			
	"Alternative für Deutschland"			
	OR "Weidel" OR "Chrupalla"			
	OR "AfD narrative" OR			
	"Populismus" OR			
	"Rechtspopulist"			
