

# **2024 European Parliament election: A comparison between the social media election campaign strategies from the “Alternative für Deutschland” and the “Die Linke”**

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In this work I made use of generative artificial intelligence. Please see the appendix for the disclosure statement.

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## Summary

Euroscepticism as a phenomena shaking the political landscape across the EU. How do Eurosceptic social media campaigning of populist right-wing and left-wing parties (PRWP's and PLWP's) compare in the European Parliament elections 2024? This study seeks to address this question by doing a qualitative content and a frequency analysis of X (Twitter) post from the PRWP "Die Alternative für Deutschland" and the PLWP "Die Linke". By focusing on a time period of two months prior to the EP elections in June 2024, Eurosceptic attitudes and further populist communication strategies are examined within German context. This study is highly relevant since Eurosceptic attitudes are not only present in the German context but can be seen throughout the EU. Populism and Euroscepticism threatens EU cohesion while having major implications on EU's relations on an international scale.

## 1. Introduction

The 10th direct election of the European Parliament (EP) were held in the beginning of June 2024. The EP plays a crucial role not only in shaping internal policies for the member states but also in influencing global affairs. Citizens from 27 member states voted a total of 720 members into office, resulting in a EP which is more fragmented, polarized and right-leaning than ever. Previous dynamics with a stable number of Social Democrats and Liberal MPs were weakened. A significant force in this election were the right-wing conservative groups - European Conservatives and Reformists, and Patriots for Europe. Radical right actors are increasingly mobilizing skepticism over polarizing issues on both national and international level (Jeong, 2024). This conforms the trend of party-based Euroscepticism across all countries (Jeong, 2024). Euroscepticism is a phenomenon shaking not only the political landscape but also the public sphere. Public opinion and individual attitudes towards Euro-pean integration are at the heart of debates, which increasingly take place online. Especially with the growing role of Web 2.0 social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, those channels are currently replacing traditional campaign websites. As social media has become a ubiquitous source of information in the digital age, it significantly shapes public opinion and is vital for election campaigns. Political actors and parties are strategically utilizing these platforms to mobilize voters, run campaigns and generally engage with individuals (Hooghe & Marks, 2007). Consequently, these services are having a considerable impact on citizens' voting behavior in the EP elections and could possibly amplify discontent and skepticism (Vladislavljević, 2015). It can be observed that populist beliefs have been aided by various social media platforms. Extremist candidates can mobilize voters more easily and bypass mainstream elites by communicating directly with citizens (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska & Bimber, 2020).

The following research will dive deeper into the use of social media in election campaigns for the 2024 EP election. It will be examined how populist parties differ in their social media election campaigning and which narratives and strategies they make use of. Especially PRWPs are actively exploiting social media algorithms and crisis narratives to amplify their reach (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig & Esser, 2017). This significantly affects the legitimacy of the EU and could lead to democratic deficits, while reducing trust in institutions (Hooghe, 2003). Research revealed that for understanding the roots of Euroscepticism, it is required to examine how mass media shape public opinion (Hooghe & Marks, 2007). The limited body of research focus on traditional (print) media, which is losing its relevance-Whereas fewer addresses how digital channels like X contribute to framing and shaping attitudes towards European Integration (Caiani & Guerra, 2017).

This study fills a research gap by contributing to the growing field of digital political communication of two ideologically distinct parties within the same context. It examines how different social media strategies are influencing perspectives on European integration. By combining research on social media campaigns and Euroscepticism, this study provides nuanced insights into how social media shape EU narratives. The results serve for future input on how effective political communication could counter populism and polarization.

The underlying scientific and social relevance is as follows. In times of extremism and populism this topic is highly relevant since it mirrors broader tendencies not only in the EU but globally. It sheds

light on the importance and power of social media platforms when it comes to voting behavior and how populist messages and fake news can spread rapidly. The relevance of social media can-not be highlighted enough, since it has the power to intensify social and political divide, amplify populist narratives and successfully deepens polarization among all parts of society. On a broader scale, the underlying case might be generalized to other EU member states. Euroscepticism has major implications for the stability of EU institutions and their legitimacy. As the rise of populism is further challenging EU cohesion, decision-making processes are more protracted and complicated. The 2024-2029 EP is more fragmented and polarized than ever. This shift opens the possibility for coalitions with PRWPs. This fragmentation and uncertainty makes the EU appear unstable to non-EU actors globally and raise questions about the EP's institutional positions in the EU (Jeong, 2024). Gaining more knowledge about Euroscepticism and populist strategies in the digital landscape is essential for safeguarding the EU's core values.

## 2. Research question

By looking closely at the EP election in early June 2024, the role of social media, specifically parties' social media campaigns are examined. The research question "How do Eurosceptic social media campaigning of populist right-wing and left-wing parties compare in the European Parliament elections 2024?" is the main research question addressed. By mainly having an explorative and comparative research question, it is aimed to comprehend and contrast the different approaches RPWPs and PLWPs are using for their election campaigns. By comparing two ideologically very different parties, it is examined how their communication and mobilization differs not only thematically but also rhetorically. Therefore, great emphasis lies on identifying key themes/narratives and communication strategies/styles. To further investigate this topic the following sub-questions are answered:

- 1) *Which narratives and thematic priorities are PRWPs using in contrast to PLWPs in their social media election campaigns?*
- 2) *What communication strategies do those populist parties use in their social media campaigns?*
- 3) *To what extent do both parties use emotional vs. factual communication?*

## 3. Theory

### 3.1. Euroscepticism

Analyzing the Eurosceptic discourse in the EP elections through social media campaigning, the concept of Euroscepticism must be clearly explained and made measurable. Euroscepticism has become a buzzword not only in the political sphere but also in academic literature. This phenomenon impacts voting behaviors, political agendas and public opinion. Attitudes towards the EU are generally multi-dimensional, which reflects the complexity of the Unions nature (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas & Vreese, 2011). Over recent years Euroscepticism has become a part of the European mainstream settling in elites' attitudes and public opinion. Even though numerous scholars are researching different dimensions of this phenomenon, it remains a catch-all umbrella term. To summarize other definitions from various studies, the theoretical approach used in this study directly refers to party-based Euroscepticism. The initial debate on this topic began in 2003 with Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart, who first introduced the concept of hard and soft Euroscepticism. After taking different critiques into account Szczerbiak and Taggart define hard Euroscepticism as "a principled objection to the EU and European integration and [which] therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being op-posed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived" and soft Euroscepticism as "there is NOT a principal objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the EU trajectory" (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008).

On the one hand, they argue that the concept should be part of a broader typology of party positions. On the other hand, they state that with a more fine-grained and complex typology, operationalizing and categorizing becomes more difficult (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008). Even though Taggart and Szczerbiak's typology met great criticism, it has never been replaced ever since. The following research adopts the definition of Szczerbiak and Taggart as it seems the most universal and widely used.

## **3.2. Party ideologies**

### **3.2.1. Right-wing populism**

The following sections will clarify right- and left-wing populism to enable a differentiated analysis in the following part. The importance of studying PRWPs become clear when looking at the huge amount of literature that has been published about this topic. An extensive literature review clarifies the disproportionate emphasis. While it was difficult to find literature on non-German populism before the 1990s, hundreds of academics worldwide are now working closely on this rising issue. It is widely accepted that the populist right is an important factor in contemporary European politics. The terminology varies according to different sources from far right, radical right-wing populism, national populism, racist extremism to extreme right. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity when it comes to precise definitions. In contrast to other party families (i.e. greens) (radical) right-wing populist do not self-identify as radical or populist (Chesterton, Marotta, Abromeit & Norman, 2016). Taking various concepts and definitions into account, this study will follow the conception from Mudde 2007, the minimal definition. The aim of this approach is to describe the core features of ideologies of all parties included in this party family (Mudde, 2007). The minimal definition is based on core concepts. When looking at party manifestation and numerous pieces of literature of parties associated with right-wing populism, special emphasis is always paid on the concept of the nation. Leading to the core concept of nationalism defined as "a political doctrine that strives for the congruence of the cultural and the political unit, i.e. the nation and the state" (Mudde, 2007). Summing up, the overall goal of parties falling into this party family are striving for a monocultural state and this can only be achieved when an internal homogenization is ensured. Extensively reviewing literature concerning nationalism, it becomes clear that this term is being conceptually stretched with various subcategories. However, this study aims at focusing on "radical" nationalists rather than on liberal nationalist. In order to clarify this distinction, the term nativism is used to exclude liberal forms of nationalism. Stating that nativism is defined as an ideology "which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state" (Mudde, 2007). This definition constitutes the core of parties associated with right-wing populism.

Generally speaking, right-wing Eurosceptics feel threatened in a sense that further integration might undermine national sovereignty and cultural homogeneity. These concerns are intertwined with anti-immigration and exclusivist beliefs (van Elsas, Hakhverdian & van der Brug, 2016). Eurosceptic conceptions are mainly motivated by a socio-cultural dimension. PRWPs fear that current and further integration has severe consequences for a member states' identity, national interest, security as well as for the welfare state. Emphasizing on cultural concerns rather than on economic ones, PRWPs oppose further European Integration, as they fear that it might erode national identity (van Elsas et al., 2016).

### **3.2.2. Left-wing populism**

While PRWPs define "the people" in exclusionary, ethnonationalist terms, PLWPs use an inclusionary understanding that encompasses women, migrants and other marginalized groups. Left-wing populism is therefore characterized by a focus on socio-economic issues (Otjes & Louwerse, 2015). Claiming that the political elite is neglecting the interest and issues of the common working person, PLWPs emphasize egalitarianism. They embrace some form of socialism. Left-wing populism can therefore be defined as "a political approach that combines the populist strategy of appealing to "the people" against "the elites" with the leftist agenda of promoting equality and social justice" (Agustín, 2020).

Euroscepticism of PLWPs results from the expected negative consequences for national welfare states and social harm to vulnerable groups. PLWPs fear that further integration, which is perceived as a neoliberal project, could jeopardize the achievements of the national welfare state. In general, it becomes distinctive that left-wing concerns take an economic-critical perspective. Emphasizing that current EU policies do not support redistribution sufficiently (van Elsas et al., 2016), left-wing Eurosceptics reject the underlying socio-economic structure of the EU with its neoliberal capitalism and linked values. Advocating for a major redistribution of resources from existing political elites, PLWPs pursue social justice and an anti-capitalist approach (Charalambous, 2011).

### **3.3. Party manifestos**

The respective manifestos serve as a basis for determining the extent to which communication on social media deviates from the party's established positions. This clarifies further communication strategies. A manifesto is an essential instrument of political legitimacy and transparency. They also serve as a communication template for the public (Berger & Jäger, 2024). Following the findings of Berger et al. it is expected that the more often an issue is addressed in the manifesto, the more often it is discussed in online communication (Berger & Jäger, 2024).

### **3.4. Electoral campaigning on social media**

Electoral campaigning has gone beyond the classic methods of speeches and TV campaigns. The internet and especially social media has created an important infrastructure for political campaigns. Social media in general can be described as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 (...)" (Vreese, 2007). Generally speaking, social media has significant effects on voter mobilization, regardless the party involved. Chadwick describes today's media landscape as a "Hybrid Media Model" where the dissemination of information is characterized by a continual crossbreeding between media platforms (Chadwick, 2017), resulting in a hybrid system in which boundaries between different forms of media are increasingly blurry. Social media platforms are therefore inherently integrated in political campaigning (Chadwick, 2017).

This study focus on X as a social media application. However, it should be mentioned that TikTok has gained popularity in recent years. Politicians are becoming increasingly active, especially to appeal to a younger audience. TikTok also plays a major role when it comes to national elections. With regard to EP elections, the role and importance of the platform is not yet apparent. In addition to TikTok, Facebook - as the oldest social media platform – still has a significant impact on election campaigning. Nonetheless, the content posted there is largely congruent with what is shared on X. Consequently, including Facebook in this study would not necessarily lead to new insights and is therefore excluded.

Various scholars point out that X (launched in 2006) is the most popular social networking platform. Since then, it has been used intensively for political campaigning. The platform enables fast microblogging, bridging between various modes of communication. Tweets vary in form, ranging from individual to institutional, political to personal or group to intergroup forms (GÜRAN & ÖZARSLAN, 2022). Due to the restricted word count for each tweet, X promotes strong framing, which is often polarizing and provocative. This can lead to unmoderated discourse streams, where especially populist actors are contributing to amplifying uncontrolled debates. Each social media platform is designed differently in terms of its structure, attracting specific target groups (Ernst et al., 2017). The average X user is described as urban, young, well-educated, and high of socio-economic status. In Germany, 44% of X users are in the age between 18 and 34, representing the young audience of users. Knowing these characteristics, politicians can tailor their campaign to the interests of these population groups. While social media enables broad reach – especially among younger people – the digital divide limits its access across demographics. Older generation, in particular, may be excluded (Tambini, 2017).

Social media campaigning presents different advantages and limitations when it comes to electoral campaigning. On the one hand, those platforms enable reaching a wider and targeted audience. Social media effectively breaks down barriers of traditional gatekeepers, which allows candidates to connect

with voters in a personal way, resulting in an active community, in which users interact through shares, comments and likes. Consequently, political discourse gets more accessible (Tambini, 2017). Especially when focusing on populist communication, actors can amplify their messages through hashtags and viral content faster than in comparison to traditional media. A high degree of relatability is achieved since politicians can present themselves authentically by sharing private content, increasing personalization and authenticity (Tambini, 2017). However, social media platforms are not subject to journalistic control. This allows actors to spread inaccurate information on an unprecedented scale, often without any objective oversight (Tambini, 2017).

### **3.5. Communication strategies (SQ2)**

#### **3.5.1. Framing**

To examine how parties utilize social media to mobilize voters and how they strategically run election campaigns on those platforms, it is crucial to mention the concept of framing as one communication strategy through which actors shape public opinion. Drawing on M. Entmann (1993), his concept of framing forms the foundation for further concepts related to Web 2.0 applications. The basis of his approach appears to be that framing involves selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient than others. Framing therefore fulfills two central functions: on the one hand, actively emphasizing certain aspects – “highlighting”. And on the other hand, the concealment or weakening of others – “masking”. This is done not only by selecting information, but also by placing it in a specific context in order to promote certain interpretations. To further explain this concept, it is essential to define the word “salience”. It describes that, through framing, a piece of information is made more meaningful. Through strategic framing, political actors can highlight threats, showcase successes, or shift responsibility onto other actors (Entman, 1993). Politicians therefore steer public attentions and influence how problems are perceived, evaluated and discussed. Consequently, framing plays an important role in shaping public debates and opinions, as it determines which topics get on the public agenda. This is particularly relevant in complex or controversial areas such as migration or European integration, where competing interpretations exist. Social media has further transformed the framing process as political actors can reach their audience directly. Since algorithms usually focus on emotionally charged content, the salience of this type of postings might be increased (GÜRAN & ÖZARSLAN, 2022).

The following expectations are set. It can be expected that PRWPs and PLWPs generally differ in their framing strategies, as highlight and mask different topics regarding their core values (SQ2). PRWPs are expected to highlight issues surrounding national sovereignty issues, while being in favor of renationalizing the power. Ignoring social issues like poverty and increasing hunger, they are also pushing focus on ending the ban on combustion engines. Simultaneously, they highlight opposing a European Social Union, since they declare that such measure would further undermine national powers of governance (Alternative für Deutschland, 2024). The core strategy of populist messages appears to address who is causally responsible for the defined problem. PRWPs address migrants, people who do not belong to their ethnically homogenous group and the corrupt EU as the source of problems.

In contrast, PLWPs shed light on social injustice coming from the neoliberal capitalist system of the EU. Emphasizing that big companies are being responsible for social injustice, exploitation and climate change. PLWPs highlight the need for redistribution in order to abolish poverty. Referring to asylum procedures, they mainly advocate for a human rights-based reception systems which guarantees dignified care and accommodation for those seeking protection at all times. However, they ignore how the current economic system supports welfare and social policies, instead claiming “green-painted” capitalism further exacerbates social injustice (Die Linke, 2024). Referring back to Entmann, PLWPs address big companies, economic elites and neoliberal forces as the source of society’s dilemma. Both fringe parties morally evaluate the people’s will as “good” and the elite’s influence as “evil” (Hameleers, Bos & Vreese, 2017).



### 3.5.2. Negative and emotional campaigning

In addition to framing strategies, populist parties actively use negative and emotional campaigning as another strategy aimed at mobilizing voters. Therefore the following communication strategies regarding emotional campaigning are expected to be found (SQ2).

Eurosceptic parties are often accused of campaigning on a very emotional and harsh level. As it is common knowledge that “bad news are good news”, populist parties often use scaremongering and negative campaign messages to gain popularity. They do not shy away from undermining social norms, in fact they rely on provocation in combination with aggressive rhetoric, setting them apart from mainstream parties (Nai, Medeiros, Maier & Maier, 2022). As the study by Nai et al. concludes, populist candidates exhibit narcissistic and bad-tempered but charismatic character traits, which are reflected in their electoral campaigning (Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019). Additionally, Eurosceptic parties tend to be in opposition, with little chance of winning elections. This correlates with the fact that these parties often run negative campaigns and also portray their competitors in a negative light (Nai et al., 2022). Another study by Frimer et al. shows that political extremists in general use more negative language compared to moderates (Frimer, Brandt, Melton & Motyl, 2019).

The following communication strategies are expected to be found in terms of emotional campaigning (SQ2). Generally speaking, it is expected that PRWPs use a communication style which is mainly simple, negative and emotional (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2023). The emotionalization of their messages is a significant element characterizing populist rhetoric. Emotional language supports their attitude in portraying a negative picture of groups that are not part of “the people” and are therefore portrayed as a potential threat to the nation state (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2023). Especially PRWPs make use of dichotomous thought, highlighting differences between different communities with words like “people”, “elite” and “we” and “us”. This rhetoric differentiates them from mainstream parties. Another strategy of PRWPs and PLWPs is the use of stereotypes. By blaming the EU, migrants or corrupt elites for several issues, populist parties provoke negative stereotypes. It is expected that both parties reduce complexity of their messages.

### 3.5.3. Evoked Emotions

Looking at PRWPs it is expected that they mainly express negative emotions in the sense of fear and anger (SQ2). On the one hand, they fear losing cultural identity in combination with increased national security concerns. On the other hand, they provoke anger as they criticize the EU for being elitist and too bureaucratic. PRWPs stir up fear by portraying the EU as an institution that allegedly disregards the interests of the “true people”. Looking at positive emotions, they emphasize on national pride and the feeling of belonging to a superior nation which is rich in tradition. Promising a return to former “glory days” they are pushing pride to unite the people. Additionally, they try to create a positive vision about a future which is free from negative influences of the EU.

It is expected that PLWPs express negative emotions like indignation, frustration and anger by criticizing the EU’s neoliberal policies, which pushes further social inequalities and austerity measures (SQ2). The resulting disadvantages for vulnerable groups outrage spark outrage - feeling that is used to question the established economic system. On the other hand, they try to evoke positive emotions, as they are emphasizing solidarity to a sense of community and belonging among citizens. A feeling of hope and optimism is expected to be found. Advocating for a more democratic Europe which is based on social justice and equal opportunities, they are expected to share optimism about drastic changes towards an inclusive and just society.

Generally speaking, both PRWPs and PLWPs strategically evoke strong negative emotions, since those generate stronger reactions than factual messages. In the context of social media, this results in more views, clicks and increased reach. Additionally, emotionalization greatly reduces the complexity of the issues. This makes it easier to identify with the message and reinforces polarization.

### 3.6. Emotion- vs fact-based communication

It can be said that populist parties generally rely heavily on emotion-based communication. However, it should be emphasized that PRWPs in particular are expected to focus on strong emotionalization and conflict orientation (Stier, S., Posch, L., Bleier, A., & Strohmaier, M., 2017). This creates a stronger emotionalization and conflict orientation. A group identity among users is formed while PRWPs normalize populist narratives in public discourse (Stier, S., Posch, L., Bleier, A., & Strohmaier, M., 2017). Especially PLWPs make use of “affective storytelling”, describing that a populist communication embeds emotions in political narratives, particularly in the form of attributions of blame (Hameleers, 2021).

Regarding SQ 3 it is expected find strong emotion-based arguments rather than actual fact-based communication on PRWPs social media. PRWPs are expected to make use of discriminating comments and drastic exaggerations to clearly underline their anger about the status quo. It is expected that PLWPs would rather use fact-based communication supporting their claims. Using studies and data to underscore their arguments. However, it is expected for both party families to occasionally integrate factual elements into blame frames. Facts might be oversimplified or distorted in order to fit into populist narratives (Michael Hameleers, Carsten Reinemann, Desirée Schmuck & Nayla Fawzi, 2019).

### 3.7. Final theoretical expectations

**Table 1**

Core theoretical insights

Research sub-questions	Populist right-wing party	Populist left-wing party
1) Narratives and thematic priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sovereignty concern</li> <li>- Threats to national security due to increased migration</li> <li>- Denying EU climate policies</li> <li>- Demanding a power shift away from EU institutions to national governments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhancing EU policies for more climate action</li> <li>- Rejections of EU's neoliberal economic system</li> <li>- Accusing the EU for social imbalances</li> </ul>
2) Communication strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- framing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o sovereignty issues</li> <li>o migration</li> </ul> </li> <li>- expressed emotions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o mainly negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ fear</li> <li>▪ anger</li> <li>▪ frustration</li> </ul> </li> <li>o positive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ pride</li> <li>▪ optimism</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- framing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o social injustice</li> <li>o criticizing neoliberal forces</li> <li>o redistribution</li> </ul> </li> <li>- expressed emotions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o mainly positive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ hope</li> <li>▪ optimism</li> </ul> </li> <li>o negative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ indignation</li> <li>▪ frustration</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3) Emotional or fact-based communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- emotion-based communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o exaggerations</li> <li>o discriminating comments</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fact-based communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Presenting studies and data</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Research design

The study is conducted through a combination of qualitative textual analysis, in particular a qualitative content analysis (QCA), and a frequency analysis. The type of text that is used in this research are X posts (Tweets), which each tweet counting as a single coding unit. As explained in the theory part, only the German context is examined. There are 720 seats in the current legislative period of the EP. 96 of these are held by German MEPs, which corresponds to the maximum number of MEPs per member state (Das Parlament, 2024). Consequently, Germany holds a decisive position and is therefore in precise focus.

When examining party manifestos from PRWPs, the “Alternative für Deutschland” (AfD), founded in 2013, is a striking party. The party was increasingly confronted with accusations of right-wing populism (Rosenfelder, 2017). In 2021, the AfD was classified as a suspected case by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution in Cologne. Resulting in the classification as an organization, which shows factual indication of suspicion of right-wing extremist and is thus considered incompatibility with the free democratic constitution of Germany. As Heiner Adamski (2021) states, the AfD could be considered anti-constitutional, and therefore serves as the subject of research in this study (Heiner Adamski, 2021).

Analyzing party manifestos on the left spectrum, “Die Linke” is clearly located as a left-wing fringe party in the German context. Founded in 2007 resulting from the merger of the Party of Democratic Socialism and a protest movement. While clearly stating that neo-liberalism is a severely limiting democracy and Die Linke places strong emphasis on social welfare policies. This party is the counterpart subject to the PRWP in this study (Charalambous, 2011).

Since X is the most popular social media platform, Eurosceptic narratives are expected to be clearly expressed there. Investigations on X identify six different official accounts that are significant for the underlying study. Three accounts per party are therefore analyzed.

In order to answer the sub-questions a holistic coding scheme is developed. Tweets serve as a fitting text basis to identify detailed populist strategies. A coding scheme with different categories and subcategories ensures a holistic analysis of reappearing key themes, priorities and how exactly the AfD and Die Linke are framing Eurosceptic narratives. The theoretical concept of Euroscepticism and its distinction between soft and hard Euroscepticism is the foundation to examine thematic priorities and key topics. The theoretical part about PRWPs and PLWPs and their ideological background serves as the basic concept for developing a coding scheme and analyzing the sub-question. This design ensures that all sub-questions are examined separately in their depth and that Euroscepticism is examined in its multi-perspective nature.

The first part deals with identifying Eurosceptic narratives, key themes and thematic priorities. This part aims to answer the first sub-questions. The coding scheme presents different thematic categories with distinctive codes which can be categorized as either soft or hard Eurosceptic statements.

A second part of the coding scheme offers a range of codes in order to identify the communication strategies. Answering sub-questions two, the coding scheme offers codes to examine framing strategies and to investigate on emotional campaigning through coding precise emotions. For sub-question three about emotion-based and fact-based communication, the category includes specific codes such as metaphors or exaggerations. One code is called “random word combination” and describes the rhetoric device in which nouns are combined to convey a message in a simplified and expressive language, e.g. “Klimavoodoo”. Fact-based communication means the use of objective data as well as the presentation of studies with references.

A frequency analysis is conducted in order to measure the salience and importance of a topic. This is examined by looking at the favorite, retweet, and view counts. Those rates indicate how many people looked at or interacted with that Tweet and therefore present a measurement showing which topics are particularly popular. Additionally, the number of Tweets published per week is presented in order to show how the regularity of post changed over the period leading to the election.

## 4.2. Method of data collection

When analyzing Eurosceptic attitudes from the AfD and Die Linke on X, the most important source of content is the official party account. Therefore Tweets serve as the unit of analysis in this research. In the specific case of the EP elections, two official X accounts for each party are of great relevance: @AfD and @AfDimEUParl for the AfD, and @dieLinke and @dieLinkeEP for Die Linke. Those accounts are the respectively official accounts from the party itself and from their stance in the EP. However, @dieLinkeEP only published two Tweets in the given time period. Therefore The Lefts delegation and their account @Left\_EU, was chosen. It should be guaranteed that the selected ac-counts from each party are as similar in their group of representation as possible. Therefore the ac-count from the delegation of the AfD, the Europe of Sovereign Nations group (ESN), should be taken into account as well in order to enhance comparability. However, the @ESNgroup\_EU did not publish anything in the given time period, which is very surprising and stands out as finding itself. Given the fact that @DieLinkeEP published only two Tweets and the @ESNgroup\_EU did not post a single tweet in the time period of 2 months before the election, there could be various reasons for this. On the one hand, they may not consider the account to be relevant enough and focus exclusively on their national accounts. On the other hand, they might have underrated the power of the official EP account and therefore missed the chance of increasing their reach and popularity.

In order to gain a more nuanced perspective, two individual accounts from each leading candidate will be examined. That is @KrahMax (Dr. Maximilian Krah) from the AfD and @schirdewan (Martin Schirdewan) from Die Linke. The EP elections took place between June 6 and June 9, 2024. It is expected that the election campaign will be at its peak two months before the election. Therefore, Tweets from the April 1 to June 9 were examined. For downloading Tweets the chrome extension TwExportly was used. This chrome add-on allows to download Tweets in an pre-selected time period. The received excel sheet does not only include the text from the Tweet but its specific favorite count, retweet count and view count, offering the opportunity for further investigation.

**Table 2**

Number of Tweets published during the selected time period

	AfD	AfDimEU- PARL	KrahMax (Maximilian Krah)	DieLinke	Left_EU	Schirdewan (Martin Schirdewan)
<b>Tweets published in the given time period</b>	249	83	258	216	179	102
			590			497

Summing up, AfD related accounts posted 107 more Tweets than Die Linke related accounts. It should be outlined that the biggest contrast appears when looking at the personal accounts from the leading candidates. The leading candidate from the AfD Maximilian Krah posted 156 more Tweets than the leading candidate Martin Schirdewan from Die Linke.

The official party's manifestos are taken into account. This is namely "Zeit für Gerechtigkeit. Zeit für Haltung. Zeit für Frieden. Programm zur Europawahl 2024" from Die Linke and „Europewahlprogramm 2024. Europa neu denken!“ from the AfD.

## 4.3. Method of data analysis

The particular method of data analysis is a QCA, defining it as an "analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material through classification, tabulation and evaluation of its key

symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect” (Krippendorff, 2019). QCA is useful for identifying unconscious as well as conscious messages, as the focus lies in assessing thematic focus points and key ideologies (Given, 2008). Since social media campaigns mainly consist of textual posts, content analysis enables to systematically categorize and compare elements across different parties or political candidates. Accordingly, documents in forms of social media postings are the database (Given, 2008). It allows a detailed description of how PRWPs and PLWPs are pushing Euroscepticism strategically in their electoral campaigning. QCA therefore serves as fitting method in order to gain deeper understanding of narratives, strategies and ideological framings used in social media campaign of populist parties. In order to measure the importance and salience of specific topics, a frequency analysis is conducted through an analysis of the favorite, retweet and view counts of Tweets. The QCA as well as the frequency analysis is conducted through the re-search tool Atlas.ti.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1. Right-wing populist party “Die Alternative für Deutschland“

#### 5.1.1. Main narratives and themes (SQ1)

The AfD’s manifesto puts great emphasis on extensively reforming the EU to a “Europa der Vaterländer”, regaining sovereignty over every policy areas and therefore dismantling the EU in its core sense. In the very first sentence of the preamble, the party states “The AfD has stood by the idea of a Europe of fatherlands since its foundation (...)” (Alternative für Deutschland, 2024). The first chapter claims the EU and in particular the EP as an undemocratic construct incapable of reform (Alternative für Deutschland, 2024). Furthermore, the sovereignty of the nation state is continually being eroded in the course of establishing a European “superstate”. While not only aiming to regain sovereignty in specific policies, they demand a dissolution of the EU in order to establish a federation. By doing this, the EP should be abolished while referendums should be given more power (Alternative für Deutschland, 2024). Stating that “We want to abolish the undemocratically elected European Parliament.” and “Any restrictions of the sovereignty of any European state the interests of the newly created community is ruled out, as the establishment of community standards that take precedence over national constitutions.” (Alternative für Deutschland, 2024), clearly reject the core idea of the Europe-an integration and reflect a hard Eurosceptic position. The second main narrative stated in the manifesto is migration. Already in the first sentence of the preamble the party states “the complete failure of the EU in all areas that affect Europe’s existence is exemplified by the negligently induced migration crisis” (Alternative für Deutschland, 2023). They aim to transfer competences back to nation states when it comes to restricting and regulating migration. The EU is said to have a negligent migration policies that stands idly by in the face of criminal smuggling gangs and illegal mass immigration. Immigration should be massively restricted, as previous policies have led to “massive social upheaval” (Alternative für Deutschland, 2023). They demand to withdrawal power back to the member states in various policy areas to increase national sovereignty. Additionally, this general stance opposing further integration indicates strong hard Eurosceptic tendencies (Alternative für Deutschland, 2024).

**Table 3**

Topics highlighted per account (AfD related)

topic	@AfDimEU- Parl	@AfD	@MaxKrah	total
migration	23	67	22	<b>112</b>
corruption / scandals	17	25	26	<b>68</b>
economy	11	12	1	<b>23</b>

institutional structure	9	10	1	<b>20</b>
sovereignty concerns	7	7	1	<b>15</b>
climate	1	1	0	<b>2</b>

An analysis of tweets from the three key accounts (@AfD, @AfDimEUParl and @KrahMax) reveals that migration is by far the most dominant topic with 112 tweets on the subject (see table 3). Across these tweets, the AfD repeatedly blames the EU for the consequences of migration and its institutional failings (Appendix B). They accuse EU migration policies of causing social instability and increased crime. The new migration pact is referred to as “(...) the cultural and economic destruction of Europe!” (Tweet nr. 58, Appendix B, 30.05.2024). The migration pact was intended to manage migration more effectively, the AfD categorically reject its contents, emphasizing that they “do not want control of illegal migration, but rather an end to it.” (Tweet nr. 14, Appendix B, 13.04.2024). Further illustrating their distrust in the EU, the party quotes MEP Gunnar Beck: “Contrary to what the media portray, the EU does NOT want to reduce illegal migration in the future, but actually increase it through numerous measures” (Tweet nr. 16, Appendix B, 14.04.2024). This shows that there is no trust in the institution and its effectiveness. They accuse the EU of euphemistically relabeling “illegal migration” as “irregular migration”. In addition, the EU is blamed for the failure of institutions such as Frontex, which they claim has led to social unrest (Appendix B). by tweeting “Protect the welfare state? Stop mass migration!” (Tweet nr. 29, Appendix B, 26.04.2024), they imply that welfare and open borders are incompatible. In their campaign, they propose strict border controls and the immediate return of migrants at the EU’s external borders (Appendix A). They further argue that migration is the main driver of increased crime, stating: “Rising migration leads to rising crime.” (Tweet nr. 16, Appendix A, 09.04.2024). This reflects a deep mistrust in the EU and its capacity to manage key policy areas.

The second most prominent topic is not as expected the institutional structure of the EU and their aim to regain more sovereignty, but scandals and corruptions within the EU. A total of 68 tweets address these issues (see Table 3). The most frequently mentioned scandal is the late disclosure of Pfizer-contracts. Stating that investigations against Von der Leyen have been opened, they demand full transparency: “However, the pages of the contract contain not only a medical scandal, but possibly also a huge corruption scandal!” (Tweet nr.2, Appendix B, 04.04.2024). Von der Leyen is repeatedly portrayed as symbolic of a corrupt EU, and calls for her resignation are frequent: “The mere fact that a Commission President may have conducted negotiations with the head of Pfizer by text message – in the same way that private citizens might communicate with the head of their yoga class – It grounds for resignation.” (Tweet nr. 9, Appendix B, 08.04.2024).

In addition to migration and corruption, the AfD strongly opposes policies related to fiscal politics, such as the digital euro or ECB initiatives. These criticism, while severe, could still be considered soft Euroscepticism, as they target specific policy areas without rejecting European Integration in principle. However, their demand for a return to the Deutsche Mark signals a complete rejection of the monetary foundation of the EU, marking a shift toward hard Euroscepticism (Appendix B). Other smaller policy areas such as support for combustion engine or the repeal of climate protection laws, could be classified as soft Euroscepticism, as they advocate returning powers to national levels in specific fields. Yet, it is significant that there is no single policy area where the AfD expresses support for maintaining or expanding the EU’s decision-making authority.

In conclusion, the AfD’s X communication during the 2024 EP election reveals hard Eurosceptic positions. Their demands for full national sovereignty, the dissolution of the EP, and a return to national currencies reinforce their rejection of the European integration project, The tweet: “An EU-Superstate would be the end to democracy!” (Tweet nr. 11, Appendix B, 09.04.2024), summarizes the party’s core message and highlights the extent of their opposition to the EU.

## 5.1.2. Communication strategies (SQ2)

### 5.1.2.1. Framing

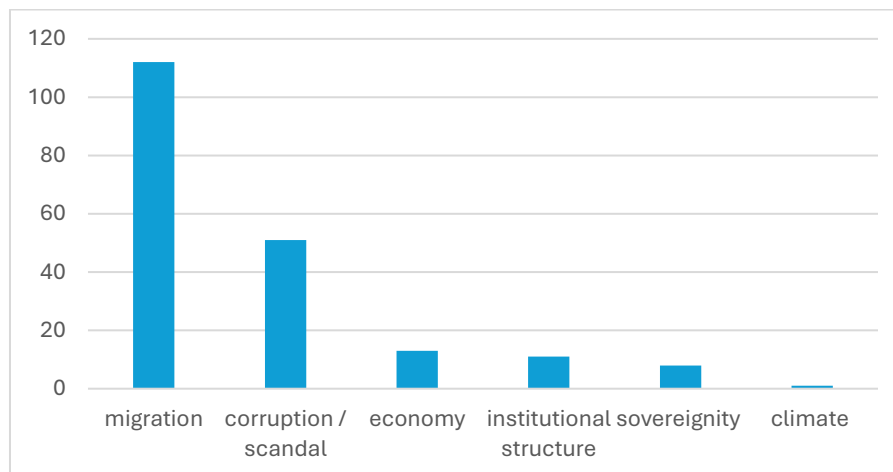
Focusing on communication strategies, the concept of framing by M. Entmann (1993) refers to an active process of highlighting specific topics while masking or downplaying others. This strategic selection shapes perception by increasing the salience of certain issues at the expense of others. Figure 1 below illustrates the five most and the least frequently discussed topics in the AfD's X communication. As anticipated in the theoretical framework, the AfD consistently frames migration as the roots cause of numerous EU-related problems, making it by far their most prominent narrative (112 times in total). Migrants are frequently blamed for social unrest and rising crime rates. Moreover, the AfD outlines its political demands, including deportation of illegal migrants and stricter border controls. For instance @AfDimEUParl tweeted: "The #massmigration from Arab and African countries (...) and the massive social unrest that all this would cause, could if at all only be contained by an EU army." (Tweet nr.10, Appendix B, 08.04.2024). Concerning border control they also demand: "We want to finally protect EU's external borders and enforce deportations!" (Tweet nr.14, Appendix B, 13.04.2024).

The second most frequent topic is the exposure of political scandals and corruption, especially targeting political opponents (51 times). In contrast, social issues such as old-age poverty, inflation or the housing crisis were not addressed at all. This selective framing clearly indicates where the party places its strategic focus. They deliberately choose emotionally charged and polarizing issues that resonate with its target voter base. An illustrative example of this selective emphasis is the near-total absence of climate-related topics, which were mentioned only once during the two-month observation period. This underscores that climate policies are not part of the AfD's political agenda. Instead of offering factual counterproposals or substantive policy goals, the party relies on targeted accusations and verbal attacks against political adversaries.

Another strategy that was standing out, is the excessive and context-independent use of the hashtag "#migration". This hashtag often appears in tweets that do not directly concern migration, indicating that the AfD seeks to manipulate algorithmic visibility on X. By doing so, they aim to maximize reach and increase the prominence of migration as a dominant theme.

Figure 1

Number of topics mentioned (AfD related)



### 5.1.2.2. Emotional campaigning

The AfD actively uses emotionally charged language in its tweets to elicit specific reactions from its audience. A disproportionate number of these emotional appeals are negative (110 in total): 62% of all coded emotions fall into this category (see Table 4). In particular, a feeling of outrage (55 times in total) is evoked with statements such as "The Green's false moral (Scheinmoral) is unbearable for everyone!"

(Tweet nr. 37, Appendix B, 30.04.2024). Additionally, many posts begin with phrases such as “even more insane: (...)” or “That’s fucked up: (...)” (Tweet nr. 19, Appendix B, 19.04.2024), followed by disparaging remarks about other political actors. The second most evoked emotions is anger (31 times in total). By posting “Damage assessment: Ursula #vonderLeyen has gotten the worst out of the EU!” (Tweet nr. 22, Appendix B, 21.04.2024 ), the AfD clearly signals a rejection of the EU Commission President’s policies and positions the AfD as a strong oppositional force.

In contrast, positive emotions are less frequently expressed (68 times in total). Among them, pride is the most common (34 times in total). The feeling is primarily associated with supporters of the party and its political agenda. For instance, Maximilian Krah tweeted: “Young people are becoming more right-wing – wonderful“ (Tweet nr.147, Appendix C, 23.04.2024), explicitly expressing pride in the youth’s political orientation toward the AfD. Likewise, by stating: “93% in favor of #de-portations to # Afghanistan! 100% of the #AfD’s position for a long time!” (Tweet nr. 78, Appendix B, 08.06.2024), the party underscores pride in its consistent hardline stance on migration. Another reoccurring emotional tactic is the use of mobilizing and provocative hashtags, such as #Abrechnung9Juni”, as well as “Quitting0906” (Appendix B). There not only express anger and a desire for political retribution but also foster a sense of hope and empowerment, suggesting that voting for the AfD offers a path the change and break from the status quo.

**Table 4**

Expressed emotions per account (AfD related)

emotions	@AfDimEU- Parl	@AfD	@MaxKrah	total
outrage	25	27	3	
anger	13	15	3	
fear	11	12	1	<b>110</b>
pride	15	15	4	
hope	9	10	1	
sense of justice	7	7	0	<b>68</b>

### 5.1.3. Emotion- and fact-based communication (SQ3)

As expected, emotion-based communication (127 instances) is employed significantly more often than the presentation of facts and knowledge (only 9 instances). The most frequently used rhetorical device in this context is exaggeration and hyperbola (61 instances). Stating that “Der Euro ist ein “Teuro”” (Tweet nr. 18, 16.04.2024) or claiming that money from the covid-fund have been a “self-service buffet for criminals” (Tweet nr.22, Appendix B, 21.04.2024), the party illustrates how complex topics are addressed in a highly exaggerated and dramatized manner, rather than through objective analysis. This type of communication is deliberately linked to emotionalization, aiming to scandalize and oversimplify multifaceted political and economic issues. Another example of this approach is the use of vivid comparisons, such as: “The EU sucks up citizen’s’ civil liberties like a black hole sucks up the surrounding matter!” (Tweet nr. 24, Appendix B, 23.04.2024). These metaphors serve to emotionally charge the narrative and create a sense of existential threat.

A further technique found frequently (41 times) is the invention of polemical word combinations reinforcing the AfD’s ideological stance. Terms like “Bürokratiemonster” (Tweet nr.24, Appendix B, 23.04.2024) or “Klimavoodoo, Gender-Gaga und Sanktionswahnsinn” (Tweet nr.15, Appendix A, 08.04.2024), are prime examples. These neologisms are not only linguistically provocative but also reflect hard Eurosceptic and anti-progressive attitudes. It must also be emphasized that the AfD frequently publishes discriminatory and racist remarks about migrants and minorities. Statements such as: “Real specialist do not come by rubber boat!” (Tweet nr.3, Appendix B, 05.04.2024) or “all the way to the



African hinterland (...): Europe will not be your new home!” (Tweet nr.3, Appendix B, 05.04.2024 ), reveal a racist worldview that is present among certain party members. Such messages perpetuate xenophobic stereotypes and align with right-wing populist exclusionary rhetoric.

As outlined theoretical section, a central feature of populist rhetoric is the use of binary oppositions, constructing a manichean worldview of “us vs. them”. This is evident in tweets such as: “The #FDP fights for weed smoking trans women, the #AfD for the people!” (Tweet nr. 46, Appendix A, 22.04.2024). Here, the AfD deliberately distances itself from other political actors, reinforcing an identity of being the sole representative of “the people” while caricaturing others. Such binary framing rejects nuance in favor of highly dramatized narratives designed to provoke mistrust and indignation..

In stark contrast, fact-based communication takes place way less frequently (9 times). When statistics are mentioned, they often relate to alleged increases in crime linked to migration. One example reads: “In March 2024, the #federal police registered more than 2,800 acts of #violance (...)an increase of 17% compared to the same month last year.” (Tweet nr.118, Appendix A, 15.05.2024). However, no official sources are provided, making it impossible to verify the validity of the data. Despite this, the inclusion of exact figures creates the illusion of objectivity and empirical grounding, even when the bases for such claims remains unsubstantiated.

**Table 5**

Emotion- or fact-based communication (AfD related)

emotion-based	@AfDimEU-Parl	@AfD	@MaxKrah	total
exaggeration / hyperbola	22	34	5	
invented word combinations	13	28	0	
pushing differences between communities	6	12	7	127

fact-based	@AfDimEU-Parl	@AfD	@MaxKrah	Total
usage of valid data and numbers	2	7	0	9

## 5.2. Left-wing populist party “Die Linke”

### 5.2.1. Main narratives and themes (SQ1)

The party manifesto of Die Linke for the EP elections 2024 serves as a primary source for identifying key narratives and thematic priorities. Even before the preamble, the front page states “Time for justice. Time for attitude. Time for peace.” (Die Linke, 2024). This immediately underlines the party’s normative core values. In the introduction, the manifesto sets a clear focus on promoting social justice through redistribution. Regarding social policy and democratic participation, Die Linke advocated for enhanced EU competences, dedicating an entire chapter to “New treaties and a constitution for the EU” - a clear indication of its support for targeted supranational integration (Die Linke, 2024). The demand

14

that “direct public investment by member states and the ECB for public services should be included in the EU treaties and strengthened,” (Die Linke, 2024), reveals that social rights and public infrastructure are increasingly seen as within the EU’s domain.

However, Die Linke also identifies policy areas in which it explicitly rejects EU competences. Its soft Euroscepticism emerges through critiques of the EU’s neoliberal treaty foundations, particularly the prioritization of capital and goods over social rights. The party argues: “The promise that Europe would grow closer together through the European Union was not kept.” (Die Linke, 2024). Accordingly, Die Linke calls for the abolition of neoliberal economic and fiscal guidelines, and for an end to the privatization policies enshrined in EU treaties. As the party puts it: “The EU can only gain broad social acceptance if it no longer follows neoliberal dogma and is not associated with personal hardships decided ‘by Brussels’.” (Die Linke, 2024). Summing up, Die Linke advocates for rebalancing EU competences: more power in matters of social justice and public services, and less in areas such as fiscal policy, privatization and market liberalization, expressing soft Euroscepticism.

Thematic prioritization differs markedly depending on the X account. As shown in Table 6, different thematic priorities emerge across different actors. The accounts @DieLinke as well as @schirdewan (Martin Schirdewan) primarily emphasize social justice (26 and 23 times respectively), mirroring the manifesto’s central concern. The recurring statements “Social justice is at the heart of our policy!” (Tweet nr.38, Appendix D, 27.04.2024) illustrates the consistency of this framing. Other topics, such as taxation, are repeatedly tied back to this overarching narrative. One of the key demands is lower taxes for low- and middle-income groups, accompanied by calls for wealth taxes and redistribution. These are not framed as isolated policies, but rather as part of a broader redistributive agenda: “We relieve the burden on small and medium in-comes by making high incomes and assets more liable.” (Tweet nr. 17, Appendix D, 16.04.2024) places strong economic demands within a collective framework of fairness.

Schirdwan’s personal tweets further reinforce this orientation. For instance he calls for a “Turning the tide of justice (Gerechtigkeitswende) towards a future that works for the majority – through massive investment & taxation of the super-rich.” (Tweet nr.3, Appendix F, 08.04.2024). Despite its critical tone, Die Linke does not reject European integration per se. Instead, they advocate for a supranational approach in areas where social rights can be strengthened. For example: “(...), the EP finally adopted the directive on improving conditions for platform workers! A huge victory for social rights (...)” (Tweet nr. 92, Appendix E, 24.04.2024).

In contrast to the German accounts, @Left\_EU emphasizes different priorities. The most frequently addressed topic (14 times) concern migration, asylum policies, and human right abuses in the Mediterranean. Tweets such as “MEP’s are burying the fundamental right to asylum in the EU” (Tweet nr. 11, Appendix E, 09.04.2024) express clear opposition to current EU asylum reforms. In addition, The Lefts blame the EU for failing to act in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, calling for a peace process and criticizing the passivity of EU institutions (Appendix E). Von der Leyen is frequently personalized as a symbol of this failure: that “If there is a symbol of that failure it is in the person of Ursula von der Leyen.” (Tweet nr.22, Appendix E, 10.04.2024). This personalization strategy is characteristic of digital populist communication, where political critique is often channeled through individual figures rather than structural analysis.

While the manifesto displays stronger Eurosceptic undertones, especially regarding economic governance, the party’s social media communication advocate more EU engagement, particularly in social policy. A complete rejection of European integration is not evident. Instead, the party proposes a differentiated approach: more EU competences in social affairs, less in neoliberal market regulation.

**Table 6**

Topics highlighted per account (Die Linke related)

topic	@TheLeft	@DieLinke	@Schirdewan	total
social justice	10	26	23	<b>59</b>

taxation	1	17	5	<b>23</b>
climate	6	11	3	<b>20</b>
economy	8	11	6	<b>25</b>
housing / rent	4	10	2	<b>16</b>
wages	2	8	7	<b>17</b>
migra- tion	14	6	4	<b>24</b>
war	9	8	2	<b>19</b>
worker's rights	9	0	0	<b>9</b>

## 5.2.2. Communication strategies (SQ2)

### 5.2.2.1. Framing

Figure 2 illustrates the five most and the least frequently addressed topics. As expected, social issues such as housing, raising the minimum wage and redistribution are at the core of their messaging. Large corporations, portrayed as embedded in an exploitative neoliberal system, are held responsible for both social inequality and climate changes. This framing is exemplified by the statement: “The neoliberal policies of cuts and privatization of recent decades have divided our society.” (Tweet nr. 38, Appendix D, 27.04.2024). It reflects a system-critical narrative in which rising inequalities are interpreted as the outcome of structural economic conditions. The strategy aligns closely with the priorities laid out in Die Linke’s election manifesto.

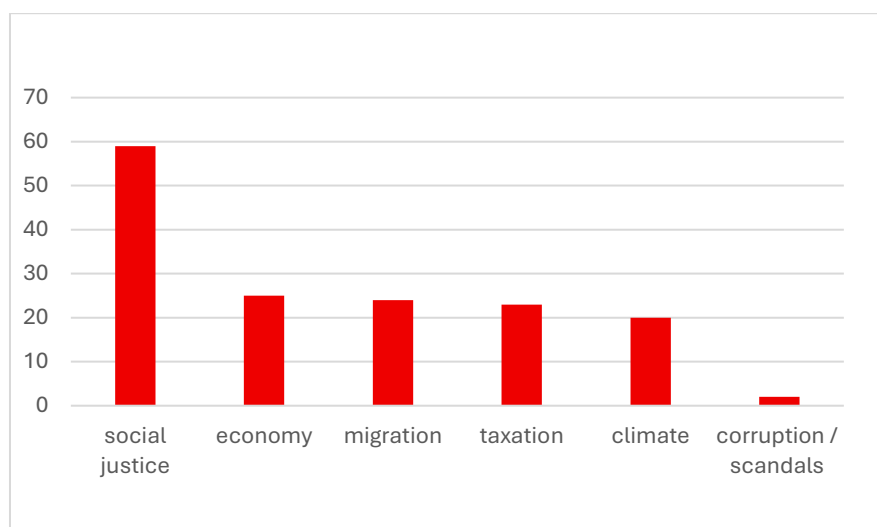
In addition, @Left\_EU places considerable emphasis on armed conflicts and humanitarian crises, particularly in the Middle East. For instance, the situation in Gaza is described with emotionally charged language: “Gaza is not just a graveyard, Gaza is a stench of death in the air.” (Tweet nr. 15, Appendix E, 10.04.2024). This rhetorical choice underscores the urgency of human rights concerns and reflects a moral framing of international issues.

Notably, the institutional structure of the EU or possible reforms are rarely addressed in the campaign posts on X. One reason may be that emotionally resonant social and humanitarian topics gain greater attention and engagement.

Another central element of their campaign is the consistent use of hashtags like “#nurmitLinks”, particularly in the slogan “Gerechtigkeit geht #nurmitLinks”, (Justice only works with The Lefts) (Appendix D). This phrase is used across almost all tweets- regardless of their specific content – and serves as a branding device to reinforce ideological consistency and voter identification.

Figure 2

Number of topics mentioned (Die Linke related)



#### 5.2.2.2. Emotional campaigning

An analysis of Die Linke's language reveals a communication strategy aimed primarily at eliciting positive emotions, most notably hope (18 times). Responding to the AfD's proposed deportation plans, Die Linke posts: "We say: Never again is now" (Tweet nr. 74, Appendix D, 08.05.2024). This is a clear call for civic courage and a strong rejection of far-right narratives.

Moreover, The Lefts consistently expresses solidarity with workers, women and marginalized groups. In the tweet "For us, workers come first!" (Tweet nr.1, Appendix E, 03.04.2024), the party not only signals identification with its electorate but also reinforces its commitment to social justice and collective rights.

Contrary to the expectation Die Linke would focus on indignation or frustration, negative emotions appear only sporadically in their messaging. However, outrage is occasionally used in relation to specific issues, such as housing. For example: "'Die Ampel' is a total failure for affordable housing." (Tweet nr. 27, Appendix D, 22.04.2024). Even in such instances, the rhetoric remains issue-focused and avoids personal attacks.

Table 7

Expressed emotions per account (Die Linke related)

emo- tions	@TheLeft	@DieLinke	@Schirdewan	total
hope	11	6	1	
solidar- ity	13	6	1	
spirit of opti- mism	1	7	1	
pride	6	4	4	61
outrage	3	11	2	
anger	1	2	1	20

### 5.2.3. Emotion- and fact-based communication (SQ3)

The analysis of Die Linke's communication strategies reveals a balanced use of fact-based and emotion-based rhetoric, contrasting the initial assumption that the party would rely more heavily on empirical, fact-driven argumentation. Instead, tweets across the three analyzed accounts display an equal distribution of both communication approaches.

A particularly noteworthy element is the frequent use of metaphorical language (10 times). In addressing the topic of sea rescue, The Lefts posted: "The Mediterranean is becoming an open-air graveyard" (Tweet nr. 164, Appendix E, 06.06.2024). This vivid metaphor powerfully communicates the human cost of refugee crisis, invoking strong emotional response such as compassion and moral outrage. The imagery frames the issue not only as a political challenge but as a profound humanitarian tragedy, prompting an ethical call to action.

Conversely, fact-based communication is demonstrated through explicit references to empirical studies and scientific evidence (12 instances). For example, in highlighting the socio-economic consequences of neoliberal policies on students and the elderly, Die Linke included a direct link to an external study: "The study reveal the disastrous consequences of our economic model (...) Read the study here <https://t.co/Xz3nf4V2j1>" (Tweet nr. 120, Appendix E, 03.05.2024). This strategic inclusion of external sources aims to lend objectivity and credibility to their arguments. By anchoring claims in documented research, the party constructs an image of seriousness and analytical grounding, thereby enhancing the perceived legitimacy of its positions.

**Table 8**

Emotion- or fact-based communication (Die Linke related)

<b>emotion - based</b>	<b>@TheLeft</b>	<b>@DieLinke</b>	<b>@Schirdewan</b>	<b>total</b>
meta- phors	4	1	5	
exagger- ations / hyper- bola	0	2	0	<b>12</b>
<b>fact - based</b>	<b>@TheLeft</b>	<b>@DieLinke</b>	<b>@Schirdewan</b>	<b>total</b>
usage of valid data and numbers	4	8	0	<b>12</b>

## 6. Comparison between right-wing and left-wing populist parties

### 6.1. Narratives and thematic priorities

A comparison of the two parties is conducted to highlight specific similarities and difference, allowing conclusions to be drawn about party-specific narratives and communication styles. As anticipated, the AfD's campaign is heavily centered on migration, while Die Linke prioritizes socio-economic issues.

The most substantial divergence lies in the parties' attitudes toward European Integration. As illustrated in Figure 3, almost 65% of the AfD's Tweets express a hard Eurosceptic position, whereas it is only 45% for Die Linke. The figure clearly illustrates that the AfD relatively expresses more hard Eurosceptic and Die Linke more soft Eurosceptic attitudes throughout the selected time period.

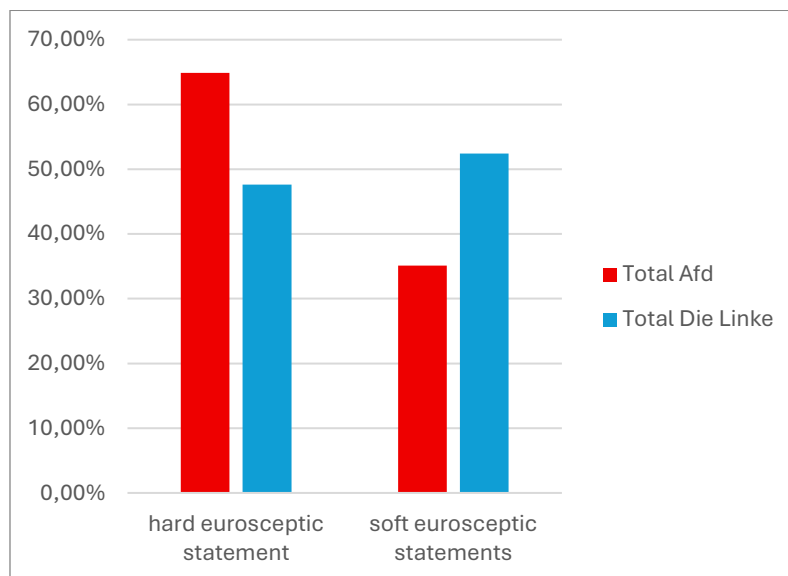
The AfD promotes a radical rejection of the EU, advocating for a broad transfer of competences back to national governments and ultimately seeking to dismantle European integration altogether. By contrast, Die Linke presents more ambivalent but fundamentally integration-friendly stance. While strongly critical of EU policies – particularly regarding social inequality and neoliberal economic models – their criticism is often constructive and aims at reform rather than withdrawal. Critique is directed primarily at the neoliberal system, rather than at the EU as an institution. In areas such as tax policy and public investment, Die Linke explicitly calls for greater supranational capacity.

Clear differences are also evident in how political opponents are portrayed. The AfD personalizes criticism by spotlighting individual figures such as Von der Leyen, often in the context of alleged scandals. This personal targeting is used to support a broader narrative for systematic corruption and democratic deficiency within the EU.

In contrast, Die Linke avoids personalized attacks, opting instead for structural critique. Their criticism of the current German government, for instance is framed as policy failure rather than moral or personal deficiency. The tone remains comparatively objective and less aggressive, aligning with their emphasis on systematic reform and solidarity.

Figure 3

Number of hard / soft Eurosceptic statements per party, relative frequency



## 6.2. Communication strategies

### 6.2.1. Framing

When it comes to framing as a communication strategy, the following differences are apparent. It is clear that both parties are deliberately using framing as a strategy to emphasize certain issues, while ignoring others. The AfD uses highly polarizing negative framings, whereas Die Linke relies on more normative, socio-political arguments that are consistent with its own programmatic self-image. The AfD's election campaign revolves almost exclusively around migration. This discourse is not only repeated frequently, but also strikingly through the use of “#migration”. The hashtag-strategy also shows contrasting characteristics. While the AfD uses provocative slogans such as “#Quit-tingam9Juni”, aiming to stir up emotions and provoke confrontation, Die Linke relies on factual thematically appropriate hashtags like “#Europawahl”, even though they do use “Gerechtigkeit geht #nurmitLink”. The AfD's goal is to delegitimize political opponents while creating a sense of separation. Expressive, memorable phrases are used intentionally to stick in the minds of users. In both cases, the use of hashtags is not only a functional element for visibility, but also a central mean of political framing and identity formation.

### **6.2.2. Emotional campaigning**

Language and its connection to the evocation of various emotion is a central component of every election campaign. Both parties focus on emotionalization, however differently regarding to the type of emotions evoked and their impact on voters. The AfD uses extremely confrontational, emotionally charged language that predominantly evokes negative emotions (110 times). Aiming to generate a sense of political urgency and moral superiority over political opponents through outrage, anger and disgust, the AfD stokes mistrust, in particular against von der Leyen. This is intended to channel frustration against the status quo of the current political leadership. However, in addition to negative emotions, voters also feels a sense of pride and are encouraged to believe that voting for the AfD will bring about political change. This binary emotionalization causes destructive emotions toward opponents on the one hand and identity-forming feelings within one's own political community on the other hand. In contrast, Die Linke pursues a more constructive approach, focusing specifically on leaving a positive impression (61 times). Their posts on X are primarily aimed at conveying hope, solidarity, and courage. Particularly striking is the communicative orientation of the delegation's account, which is strongly characterizes by an encouraging and uplifting language. Statements regarding solidarity with minorities and migrants, demonstrate a clear stance against right-wing populist forces. Simultaneously, an emotional mobilization in the sense of collective resilience is evoked. Emotions do not function as means of differentiation, but rather as a tool for more integration and an atmosphere of optimism.

Overall it can be said that the AfD primarily relies on polarization and mobilization through anger by means of aggressive, conflict-oriented campaigning. Die Linke strives for hopeful frames intending to foster trust in social justice and collective cohesion. The emotional style of both parties is thus not only an expression of their respective ideologies, but also a strategy tool in social media election campaigning to attract attention, gain approval and foster political identification.

### **6.2.3. Frequency Analysis**

#### **6.2.3.1. Chronological development of X posts**

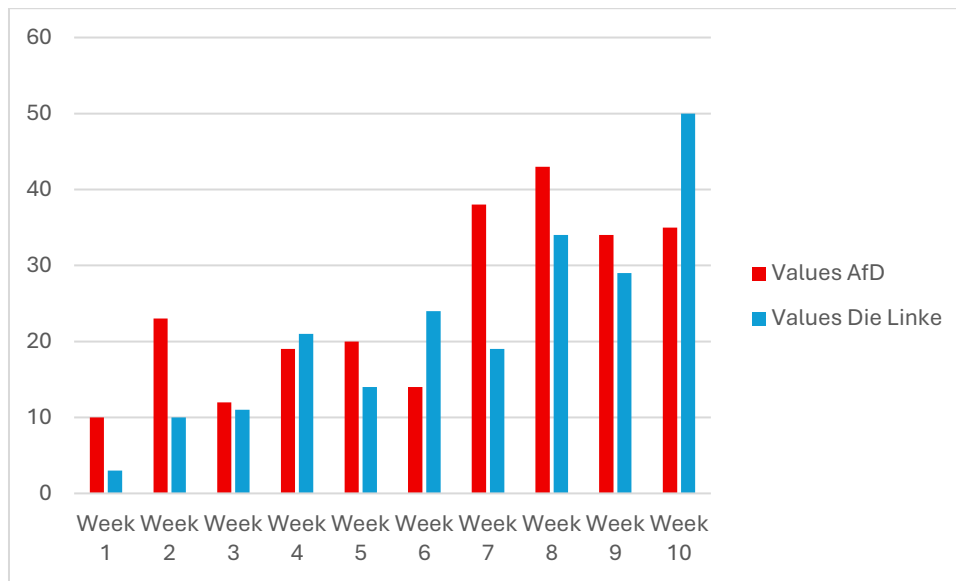
Figure 4 illustrates the weekly posting frequency of the official X accounts of @DieLinke and @AfD over the selected pre-election period. The frequency and regularity of posts is also an active strategy to increase reach while ensuring maximum visibility. This increases the possibility of convincing undecided voters. Overall, both parties demonstrated a noticeable increase in activity as the election approached, reflecting a strategic intensification of their digital campaigning efforts.

The AfD consistently posted more frequently than Die Linke in most weeks. Particularly noteworthy is the sharp surge in AfD activity during weeks 7 and 8, suggesting a tactical escalation in message dissemination during this critical campaign phase. In contrast, Die Linke reached its peak posting volume in the final week before the election, publishing 50 posts, indicative of a targeted effort to boost visibility in the immediate lead-up to election day.

These developments suggest that both parties actively increased their presence on X during the campaign, with Die Linke adopting a concentrated end-phase communication strategy, while the AfD employed a sustained and early intensification approach.

Figure 4

Number of Tweets per week per party



### 6.2.3.2. Engagement rates

Table 9 presents selected engagement rates, including the number of favorites, retweets, and views of individual posts. This data provides insight into which tweets generated particularly high levels of user interaction, offering a proxy for audience resonance and communication effectiveness. Higher engagement rates are often associated with increased visibility and mobilization potential, suggesting which narratives or communication styles are more effective in capturing public attention. However, it is important to note that the baseline discrepancy in follower counts across party-affiliated accounts. The combined follower totals of the AfD-affiliated accounts - @AfD (450.2 thousand), @AfDimEUParl (24.7 thousand) and @MaxKrah (92.6 thousand), exceed those of the Die Linke-affiliated accounts - @DieLinke (355.3 thousand), @Left\_EU (60.3 thousand) and @schirdewan (13.3 thousand). This asymmetry may affect overall engagement levels and should be considered when interpreting performance data.

Notably, there may be a correlation between communication style and audience growth. The AfD frequently integrates antagonistic rhetoric, which appears to enhance engagement. For example, the hashtag #StolzstattScholz, is employed to rhetorically underline their opposition to the current government, tapping into broader discontent among their base. This polarizing style appears to stimulate strong emotional reactions, contributing to higher engagement rates.

In contrast, Die Linke's most favorite tweet adheres closely to the party's official policy positions, maintaining a more neutral and programmatic tone. While this style aligns with their ideological focus on social justice and institutional critique, it may generate lower immediate engagement compared to more provocative messaging.



**Table 9**

Engagement rates

	<b>Tweet (AfD related ac- number count)</b>	<b>Tweet (Die Linke related ac- number count)</b>
<b>most favorite count</b>	Auch im diesjährigen #Stolzmonat bleibt es dabei: #StolzStattScholz! @AfD (2024-06-03)  <b>6358</b>	Diese Ungleichheit ist wirklich unfassbar. Das was @GregorGysi sagt. Und er sagt natürlich, wer eine Partei stärken will, die für soziale Gerechtigkeit und für Frieden ist, muss Die Linke wählen. @DieLinke (2024-06-07)  <b>587</b>
<b>most re-tweet count</b>	"Linke beleidigen mich als schwarzer Nazi und dummer Affe": Die aus Nigeria stammende Catherine Schmiedel berichtet im Rahmen unserer Interviewreihe "Mit Migrationshintergrund für Deutschland" über ihre Erlebnisse als #AfD-Mitglied. @AfD (2024-04-08)  <b>1167</b>	Wir präsentieren: Unser Wahlspot zur #Europawahl! ☯ Denn Gerechtigkeit geht #nur mitlinks @DieLinke (2024-05-09)  <b>128</b>
<b>most view count</b>	"Freibäder endlich sicher machen! - #DeshalbAfD #AfD #Freibad @AfD (2024-05-28)  <b>627855</b>	Kampf gegen Dschihadismus sollte bei EU-Außenpolitik anfangen. Partner Erdogan bombardiert demokratische Institutionen in #Rojava &; droht mit Invasion. Es droht Ausbruch Tausender #IS-Kämpfer. EU &; Ampel müssen Angriffe endlich verurteilen &; Waffenembargo gegen Türkei verhängen! @schirdewan (2024-06-05)  <b>51014</b>

### 6.3. Emotion- and fact-based communication

An analysis of emotional and factual communication style highlights differences between the two parties. Similar stylistic devices are used, but intensity, approach and technique vary greatly. In its election campaign, the AfD relies heavily on emotional language (127 times), which allows them to convey their core issues to voters in an expressive and emotionally charged manner. The use of exaggerations and polemical comparison is particularly characteristic. Therefore, objective and sober arguments are being

neglected. The AfD frequently relies on highly simplified facts and emphasizes them with expressive slogans, sometimes making discriminating statements.

In contrast, Die Linke tends to communicate in a more balanced manner, underlining factual arguments with emotional appeals. Especially when it comes to humanitarian issues, like human rights abuse in the Gaza zone, Die Linke wants to spark moral reflection and uses means to present its statements in a dramatic way. Strongly figurative language should evoke compassions and empathy in the user.

The biggest difference between lies in the regularity of fact-based argumentation. While Die Linke frequently bases its position on objective facts, citing the sources of its information, neutral facts are rarely found in the AfD's arguments. Even though they increasingly use data to illustrate the rise in crime due to migration, they never cite an objective source. This complicates verifying the validity of their statements. However, the credibility of the arguments is allegedly strengthened by citing figures, regardless of whether a source is given or not.

In summary, it can be said that Die Linke uses more balanced communication style between emotional presentation and objective facts. The AfD, on the other hand, uses highly emotional language to reinforce its arguments in a polarizing way, with a strong emphasis on differentiation from other communities.

## 7. Discussion

The analysis clearly revealed that PRWPs and PLWPs adopt different Eurosceptic positions in their election campaigns. The analysis shows differences and similarities, which have already been discussed. Looking at the two communication channels of the party's, X postings and their manifestos, distinctive peculiarities were striking. A key finding here was the clear discrepancy between the programmatic emphasis in the manifesto compared to their communication on X. As the theory part about PRWPs highlights, the AfD expresses a hard Eurosceptic position as they aim to draw back competences from the EU in order to increase nation states sovereignty and ultimately aim to dismantle the EU and further integration. It was expected that the campaigning would put more emphasis on these issues, focusing on national sovereignty concerns. This was not necessarily the case. Sovereignty issues have been mentioned (8 times) in combination with the aim to drastically reform the EU. However the majority of the post almost solely turns around migration, closely followed by the exposure of scandals. This strategic weighting of topics can be interpreted with the background of Entmann's framing theory. Migration is disproportionately emphasized using negative emotions and strong rhetoric, in contrast to their manifesto, resulting in a conscious selection of a highly emotional and polarizing topics. Simple narratives are created which reduce complex political content and contribute to the mobilization of specific target groups. The institutional hard euroscepticism, as they even demand to abolish the EP, is thus strongly overshadowed as they increase digital reach and view more effectively with focusing on migration (Alternative für Deutschland, 2024).

The manifesto of Die Linke offered more hard Euroscepticism tendencies, as they want to restrict EU competences in neoliberal treaty provisions such as debt brakes. Their X postings however, expressed lots of demands and promotion for more supranational directives in areas like social and health policies. Their framing strategy is therefore in line with the priorities set out in the election manifesto, since social justice is the core principle expressed in the manifesto as well as on Twitter. All in all, a holistic rejection of the European Integration was not evident. The criticism expressed is primarily addressed to the neoliberal system of the EU and the exploitation of workers, leading to social injustice. The EU as such is therefore not strongly criticized, but rather the system in which it is embedded and constantly reinforcing through different austerity measures.

Ultimately, both parties are showing deviation from their manifestos. However, the biggest thematic difference with regard to their Eurosceptic position can be seen directly in the example of the structure of the EP. The AfD is calling for the abolition of the Parliament, while Die Linke is even seeking to give the EP the right of initiative (Die Linke, 2024).

The widespread presence of the issues relating to migration was particularly noticeable. Migration and war were central topics receiving special attention from both parties – albeit with very different positioning. The AfD strongly aims to portray migration as a threat to national security and to the welfare state in general. According to the party, the failed migration policy, in which the EU plays a significant role, leads to social decline and rising crime. Die Linke, and in particular The Lefts, does not focus specifically on the domestic political consequences of migration, but rather on the current inhumane situation at EU's external borders and in the Mediterranean. They draw attention to human rights abuse and aim to generate solidarity with vulnerable groups being directly affected by the EU's asylum law. The Russian invasion and the humanitarian emergency in Gaza receive particular focus. Despite fundamentally different stands of the parties on this issue, they both instrumentalize this emotionally charged issue to criticize the EU. While the AfD accuse the EU for neglecting national interests and security, Die Linke blame them for immoral behavior, which is manifested on the one hand by the rejection of the migration pact and on the other hand by their perceived complicity in military policy approaches. Both parties instrumentalize this issue referring to different emotions. As the AfD especially evokes a feeling of outrage, anger and frustration in the user, Die Linke wants to evoke hope and empathy. This shared focus on emotionally charged and polarizing narratives underlines the strategic function of those narratives in populist campaigning. Affective resonance often outweighs nuanced policy debates.

Those findings furthermore suggests certain actions from the political side. Above all, education in media literacy should be supported stronger. Political education has to discuss the impact of social media mechanisms, including algorithms and fake-news. Users should be able to question and critically react to misinformation and emotional manipulation in order to limit populism.

## 8. Conclusion

Drawing back on the research questions of how Eurosceptic social media campaigning of PRWPs and PLWPs in the EP election 2024 compare, this study's analysis highlights that while both parties expressed Eurosceptic positions, their intensity, thematic prioritization, communication strategies and rhetoric revealed significant differences.

Looking at thematic differences, the AfD heavily focuses on migration and especially on the denigration of political opponents, thereby creating enemy stereotypes. Die Linke however, pushes socio-economic issues whereby blame is shifted onto larger corporations and companies rather than the EU institutions itself.

Referring back to SQ 2, the AfD communication strategy can be summarized as actively framing certain controversial topics like migration as they make use of highly emotionalized language, negative emotions, which are in particular underlined through the repetitive use of specific hashtags. Striking is, that while the AfD mainly uses negative phrasing, Die Linke relies more on evoking positive emotions in order to amplify their reach. They do express more factual communication even in their use of hashtags.

Concerning emotional- and fact-based communication (SQ3), the AfD uses highly emotional-based communication, as they mainly exaggerations and neologism. This renders the content highly emotional, eliciting stronger reaction from the user which contributes to a more polarizing impact. The Linke however, reveals a balanced use of both communication styles. Strong metaphors are frequently utilized in order to underscore their message about human rights abuse in war zone. Nonetheless, studies and specific data is presented to objectively support their arguments.

Overall, the findings underscore the relevance of emotional and negative campaigning on social media. Making active use of those strategies, the AfD achieved greater success in voter mobilization and in online agenda setting. The asymmetry in the social media success of both parties is further reflected in the EP, leading to a more fragmented political landscape where populist right-wing actors increasingly gain recognition. Additionally, the study highlights the relevance of social media platforms as crucial arenas for political contestation. Fringe parties can therefore bypass traditional gate-keepers and actively influence the public opinion. These highly emotional discourses not only influence

elections, but also challenge democratic values and institutional trust, as misinformation and manipulation is given more leeway. This underlines the great responsibility of policymakers and media actors to secure media literacy and to promote transparency, enabling fact-based and neutral debates. Dynamics of digital political communication need to be addressed in order to minimize polarization and democratic erosion.

## **9. Limitations and future research**

This study is subject to the following limitations. The analysis focus exclusively on two parties within the German context. However, Euroscepticism is a widespread phenomenon that is particularly prevalent in Germany's neighboring countries. Consequently, the case selection limits the generalizability within the European context. In addition, the study only considers X as a social media platform. Especially TikTok is having an increasing influence on election campaigns. Another limitation is that QCA including interpretations of perceived emotions and rhetoric on X postings remain susceptible to subjective assessments. Even though a systematic coding scheme is used, it cannot be completely ruled out that one's own political stance does not influence the interpretation of tonality, rhetoric, etc., and therefore room for interpretation remains.

Possible further studies could focus more on a comparison between different member states as well as different social media platforms, in order to receive a holistic representation. In addition to QCA, it could be interesting to integrate a mixed-method design and examine more closely the effect of Eurosceptic statements on different target groups. In particular, the role of X algorithms should be taken into account, as these algorithms have a decisive influence on the content that users see by increasing or reducing the visibility and range of Tweets. Having that in mind, parties might strategically further utilize specific framing strategies.

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## 11. Appendix

### 11.1. Coding Scheme

	SQ	soft euroscepticism	hard euroscepticism
	<b>SQ1: narratives / themes</b>		
<b>populist right-wing party</b>	sovereignty concerns	feeling of being threatened by further decline in sovereignty claims	current EU policies fully undermine sovereignty of member states
		EU external borders are framed as a key issue associated with sovereignty	migration is framed as a threat to national culture and social security
	migration	accusing EU institutions for failure	accusing migration policies (specifically migrants) as the origins of massive social dislocation / crimes
			accusing EU institutions for leading to a migration crisis
	climate	opposing EU environmental policies	EU policies like the Green-Deal are portrayed as devastating for their own member states' economy
	institutional structure	demand dismantling of EU competences	call for the dissolution of the European Union
		claiming that the current structure of the EU demonstrate democratic deficits	accusing the EU for making corruption possible
			advocating for an establishment of a federation of European nations
	economy		considering the Euro as a failure
			claiming EU policies as destroying prosperity
			rejecting EU fiscal policies
<b>populist left-wing party</b>	<b>SQ 1:narratives / themes</b>		
	migration	wanting to create a safe path to Europe for immigrants	accusing Frontex for worsening the situation for refugees



		rejecting EU migration policies (CEAS)
	climate	EU policies are not sufficient in order to tackle climate change blaming the EU for the collapse of the ecosystem and for plundering of natural resources
	economy	redistribution to weaken big companies, increasing social justice advocating for expropriation
		Fighting for more tax justice stating that the EU is under corporate lobbying
		increasing minimum wage rejecting of the capitalist market of the EU
		advocating for a fair pension system
		relieving lower incomes; raising wealth tax
		Price reduction on basic goods
	social inequality	accusing the EU to be responsible for social imbalances and poverty blaming the capitalist system as the reason for growing inequalities
		Promoting affordable housing
		redistribution for more social justice
<b>both parties</b>	<b>SQ 2: communication strategies</b>	
	framing	migration
		economy
		sovereignty
		social justice
		climate
		corruption / scandals
		war
		taxation
		housing / rent
		worker's rights
		institutional structure
	emotional campaigning	positive negative

		hope	fear
		pride	anger
		belonging	outrage
		sense of justice	uncertainty
		solidarity	frustration
		a spirit of optimism	hostility
<b>both parties</b>	<b>SQ 3: emotion-based or fact-based communication</b>	emotion-based communication	fact-based communication
		Exaggerations / hyperbols	usage of valid data and numbers
		pushing differences between communities ("us" vs "them")	
		racist / discriminating comments	
		neologism	
		using metaphors	

## 11.2. Documents

The following documents are attached in the separate data appendix. The Zip-folder contains:

- 6 excel sheets containing the downloaded Tweets:
  - o Appendix A: Tweets AfD
  - o Appendix B: Tweets AfDDimEUParl
  - o Appendix C: Tweets KrahMax
  - o Appendix D: Tweets Die Linke
  - o Appendix E: Tweets The Lefts
  - o Appendix F: Tweets Schirdewan
- the Atlas.ti file with the coded Tweets
- the figures, portrayed in this thesis, if due to technical problems the PDF has issues portraying them

## 11.3. AI Statement

During the preparation of this work the author used ChatGPT and DeepL in order to check spelling, grammar and to summarize literature. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

The following tools were used:

- ChatGPT
- DeepL