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Master Thesis

Putin-Versteher? - An Analysis of the Policy Narratives of German Anti- Establishment Parties Toward the Russian Government

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by

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Abstract

In recent years, the relationship between German anti-establishment parties and Russia is determined by evolving political and pragmatic considerations, involving, on the one hand, the desire to reshape the seemingly hostile national or international environment to suit one's own interests and, on the other, the need to gain or restore dwindling or absent national or international legitimacy. While scholars have mainly concentrated on the relationship between far-right parties and Russia, they have largely neglected the connection between Russia and parties from the left spectrum. This paper argues that the close relationship to both political spectra can be explained by ideology and strategy. While far-right parties see Putin as the role model for a conservative leadership aiming to defend traditional values, far-left parties share the reluctance of the U.S. position on the international stage. Furthermore, the rapprochement with Russia is chosen by both parties as an "issue" to polarise compared to other German mainstream parties and thus attract more voters. Therefore, this investigation aims to question the extent to which the relationship with Putin's Russia is ideological or merely a strategic calculation to increase the party's own electorate while polarising using pro-Russian sentiments. With the help of a content analysis of the parliamentary speeches and debates as well as the election manifestos between 2013 and 2022, the developments of the Ukrainian crisis were used to find that only the AfD's (right-wing) direct connection to Russia can be explained by its ideological conviction. Moreover, the AfD uses that as a strategy to stand away from the mainstream and address potential voters. Indeed, this approach is also used by another anti-establishment party, Die Linke (left-wing), which has certain difficulties explaining its close ties to Russia based on its ideological affiliation and thus, sees a strategy to attract voters by formulating a solution for a rapprochement with Russia that essentially varies from those of the mainstream.

Keywords party competition – anti-establishment – issue entrepreneurship – Germany – ideology – strategy – Russia

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List of Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union
EE	European Elections
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
FE	Federal Elections
GAL	Green-alternative-libertarian parties
H1 & H2	Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2
IR	International Relations
N	Number of cases
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RT	Russia today
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
TAN	Traditional-authoritarian-nationalist parties
U.S.	United States

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1. Introduction

"Peace and security in Europe […] cannot exist without, let alone against Russia."

(Gregor Gysi, 27.01.2019)

While most mainstream political players in Germany have condemned Russia's activities in the armed conflict with Ukraine, not all parties have criticised Vladimir Putin's political choices. Moreover, the crisis has been a catalyst for many reports regarding the hitherto little-noticed phenomenon of the convergence between the Kremlin and different European anti-establishment parties from the far-right and far-left ideological leanings (Polyakova, 2016). In recent years, mutual suspicion and ambivalence have been the key characteristics of the Russo-German relationship. However, like in other European countries, German politicians, policymakers, and journalists identify themselves as so-called *Putin-Versteher*[1]. An example is the German left-wing politician Gregor Gysi who emphasised the importance of strengthening the role of the OSCE on 27th of January 2019 during a Bundestag debate. He demands that NATO cannot be the sole guarantor of security for the EU and thus also for Germany. According to him, an equal exchange of solutions with Russia on European security issues is essential. A similar approach is used by the AfD (right-wing), which also has a favourable position toward the Kremlin's policies.

Interestingly, even after the war in Ukraine, politicians like Sarah Wagenknecht (Die Linke) and Alice Weidel (AfD) still emphasise their understanding of Putin's strategy in Ukraine. Why do those two ideologically so different parties intersect regarding the role of Russia? What is the basis for this sympathy towards Russia? Is it ideologically deep convictions or rather a strategic manoeuvre to enlarge the electorate? This study aims to answer why these parties exhibit such strong sympathy for Putin while focusing on the similarities and differences between those parties.

Concerns about these tendencies appear to be heightened considering Germany's current state, which is characterised, among other things, by austerity measures, the Eurozone crisis of 2008, the danger of terrorist attacks, the migration crisis of 2015, and a perceived lack of adequate leadership. Consequently, the continued recession of democracy has posed a sustained challenge to the current liberal democratic order. Bonanno (2017) identified these sensitive issues as a "crisis of neoliberalism," which has worsened the overall cohesion between the German political actors

[1] This term is a German neologism referring to a judgmental, usually pejorative, for people who defend Vladimir Putin's actions in discussions with relativising argumentation (Umland, 2016).

and its citizens. Russia's apparent cooperation with anti-establishment parties, which blame liberal democratic governments for national problems, is frequently viewed as an attempt to weaken Germany further and to destroy liberal democracy abroad, particularly in the Western mainstream media. For example, in an article in the *Economist,* the author argues that the rise of populist parties is "to push governments into more Eurosceptic positions" to complicate "to come up with a […] united response to Mr. Putin's military challenge" (The Economist, 2014).

Among these developments, the Kremlin's willingness to take advantage of the instability in the current instabilities of the German system is noteworthy. One example is the increasingly confident rhetoric of Vladimir Putin. The Russian leader, who once called the Soviet Union's collapse a "great geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century" (Reuters, 2018), appears to be engaging in a political project geared at boosting Russia's reputation as a "great power" in a globalised and multipolar world. This has led to a tense foreign policy, with various military conflicts in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014 - now) changing the economic and social status quo worldwide. Simultaneously, some scholars (Makhashvili, 2017; Rumer, 2016; Jankowicz, 2020) though still difficult to verify, claim a Russian-initiated "information war" against Western interests complements. There is talk of alleged interference in elections and even promoting "fake news". This has encouraged scepticism about the alleged ideological gap between liberal ideals and practice. As a result, the relationship between Germany and Russia shifted into one of the most complex ones within the EU (Leonard et al., 2007; Light, 2008).

The connection between Russia and fringe political parties is often neglected and, thus, less discussed in the scholarly spotlight. However, this link is based on a previous interaction rooted already in the Cold War era. Soviet authorities maintained successful contacts with their communist counterparts in Western Europe. Yet, support for some fascist organisations that hailed Moscow for its supposed traditionalism has been determined. This extraordinary capacity to appeal to many radical positions extends to the present day. It is primarily ascribed to Russia's periphery geopolitical location in Europe, which according to David Hazen (2008), describes Russia as a "blank slate" for revolutionary ideas. Such a link continues as many groups interpret the country's geopolitical position through their viewpoint. Therefore, for example, it is generally overlooked that many far-left groups currently see Moscow as a significant partner in opposing Western capitalism and American hegemony (Francois & Schmitt, 2015; Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016).

However, it should be noted that this interest is now dominated by Europe's rising radical right movements, which are growing in their influence.

While scholarly attention has focused chiefly on the relationship between far-right parties and Russia, researchers have also noticed that the appeal to anti-imperialism and the battle against American hegemony has built a connection between the far left and Russia (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016). According to Onderco (2019), three reasons may motivate this development. First, there is considerable evidence that many anti-establishment parties are ideologically fascinated with Putin's Russia, and thus, through networking, many of these parties hope to strengthen their strategic position (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016; Polyakova, 2016;). Secondly, similar goals exist such as encouraging a more vital role for nation-states, limiting collaboration with Europe, and restricting minorities' religious or sexual rights (Klapsis, 2015; Snegovaya, 2022). Lastly, as many leaders of these parties are fascinated by Russia, an active connection to Russia's elite is an essential component (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016; Krekó & Szabados, 2009). Klapsis (2015) went a step further and mentioned that the new phenomenon of the close interactions between both is based on two key components: ideology and strategy. Despite this, there remains minimal conceptual linkage between research into the relationship between anti-establishment parties and Russia and the expanding scholarly interest in analysing the decisive reasons for German parties to focus exclusively on pro-Russian sentiments. However, understanding the parties' incentives for supporting Russia's narratives and motives is essential to developing suitable policies (Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2014).

Consequently, this study seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship on studies on party competition. First, this work assumes that parties are in constant competition with each other, and therefore the choice of selected issues and their positions are of particular importance. The goal is to explain party behaviour in which issues of the electoral agenda evolve and thus, directly affect party competition. In the context of pro-Russian sentiments, current theories of party competition have ignored how anti-establishment parties are eager to highlight their pro-Russian stance and make this topic their own. Thus, Hobolt's and de Vries's theory of *issue entrepreneurship* (2015) is essential for this paper. It refers to a strategy in which parties mobilise issues that have been mostly disregarded in party rivalry and embrace a policy stance on the issue that differs significantly from the mainstream status quo. The main argument is that when political parties lose on the dominating dimension of contestation, they are more prone to become issue entrepreneurs.

Thus, this paper focuses on two cases identified as "losers" (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015) on the dominant extent of contestation since both were only in oppositional functions at the federal level: AfD and Die Linke. Due to the remarkable election results of those parties, it is evident that their increased power has enabled them to push for a change of the issue basis of party competition and thus "upset the dominant party alignment" (Carmines & Stimson, 1993, 154). Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

"What positions have German anti-establishment parties taken vis-à-vis the Russian government under Vladimir Putin since 2013, and how can the commonalities and differences between these positions be explained?"

Thus, to complete this analysis, two hypotheses can be advanced. The first hypothesis relates to the ideological perspective of the party. It is assumed that a pro-Russian position is based on an exclusively ideological conviction toward Putin's Russia. The second hypothesis focuses on the strategic behaviour of the party. Through the analysis of different contexts in the Ukrainian crisis, it is assumed that the pro-Russian stance is not exclusively based on ideological proximity but rather on strategic advantages in the context of party competition and particularly if foreign developments are overlapping while a societal expectation exists in which the parties must position themselves correctly.

H1: German anti-establishment parties have a pro-Russian position due to a profound ideological affinity with the Russian government under Putin.

H2: German anti-establishment parties with a pro-Russian position use it to strategically differentiate themselves from other parties and thus attract new voters.

In conclusion, investigating how electoral competition issues develop and what role parties play in this process might help improve knowledge of electoral behaviour and supplement existing ideas on party competition and democratic function. Even though there are various case studies in which changes in competition issues are investigated, they are often explored by removing the cases from the regular course of party competition, with no counterfactuals to assist in

demonstrating causality (Chou et at., 2021; McLean, 2006; Tzelgov & Olander, 2018; Heppell 2013). Some efforts have also been made to comprehend changes in both parties' agendas as well as the factors that impact voting in a comparative manner (Layman & Carsey, 2000; de Vries & Hobolt, 2012). Nevertheless, to effectively comprehend the impact of issue changes in the electoral scene, research must be conducted within and across cases simultaneously to isolate the effects of the various components. This research investigates issue changes in the election environment and the relationships between party and voter agendas. The study creates a more profound knowledge of the phenomena and advances beyond evident and indisputable realignments by embracing, on the one hand, different from focusing on Russia's advantage in this relationship. The goals of anti-establishment parties are analysed. On the other hand, ideological affiliation and strategy stand in contrast. Furthermore, including the concepts of time and change expands our understanding of the importance of issues beyond structural features.

1.1 Societal and Scientific Relevance

This research contributes to the academic field of study and the political, public, and social debates about the relationship between Russia and German anti-establishment parties. Regarding societal significance, the importance of these topics is related to parties' behaviour during and after elections, such as the parliamentary election in September 2021 in Germany. Based on the examination of ideological affinity vs strategy, this paper wants to increase the societal awareness of how parties from both ideological leanings use pro-Russian sentiments as their "issue" for vote- & office-seeking. Due to an endangered political system, factors undermining liberal democracy are necessary to identify and reveal. By using new social media to contact potential voters (Schmidt, 2022), which facilitates the transfer of information, those parties aim to address and maintain voters. In addition, there is often a lack of reflection on the issues raised due to the speed of this medium. Proximity to other countries, such as Russia, can strengthen their relevance and thus expand their constituency, as is the case for the AfD, which seeks rapprochement with the Russian-German community by, for instance, translating its manifestos into Russian. Therefore, this paper aims to analyse the moment the issue of "pro-Russian narratives" is used based on ideological affinity and when it might shift into strategic inter-party behaviour. The findings of this unique study will provide society with further insights into the use of issues for their benefit and thus, enables the organising of appropriate measures.

Scientifically, the study aims to close a huge research gap by adding multiple insights to previous studies. In terms of the broader contribution of this study to scholarship, there are currently few studies on the link between Russia and far-right political parties (Klapsis, 2015). The speciality of this work is that a comparison is drawn between the left-wing and right-wing party's stances towards Russia whereas previous studies seem to have mainly focused on either the left or the right spectrum. Moreover, the study will focus on a period of almost nine years in which the context of the war against Ukraine makes it possible to examine in depth the extent to which positive positions toward Russia were guided by genuine ideological convictions or mainly by strategic considerations. Under the assumption, that it will become increasingly expensive in electoral terms to support Putin after the invasion of Ukraine, support for Russia is likely to decline among those who use the Russia issue primarily as a strategic tool to distance themselves from the mainstream. Thus, the overtime analysis aims to identify relevant mechanisms at the party level that might lead to shifts in the position towards Russia.

Furthermore, the findings of this study will assist in a better understanding of the causes of issue entrepreneurship of this topic for anti-establishment parties. Essential knowledge will be gained for scholars, which will motivate further research using this paper's results. In particular, the question of mechanisms within parties that position themselves as *Putin-Versteher* can be further explored to break down inner-party structures and thus analyse them more precisely. However, also, from a more general perspective, since the continuation of the alliance between the anti-system parties and Russia is likely to continue, this thesis aims to offer a detailed assessment of the ideologies and strategies motivating an increasingly significant political shift in unpredictable Germany. Therefore, this study explains the differentiation between the ideology and strategy of parties. This will help to further explain the existence and popularity of those types of parties and motivate more examinations in this field of subject.

The remainder of this paper continues as follows: the next chapter will focus on the appropriate theoretical framework, including the literature on party behaviour, considering party competition, proximity models and issue entrepreneurship, and the specificities of the interrelation of populism and the German political system, to adequately answer the study issue. Based on the theoretical foundation, assumptions can be made about the intention of emphasising a pro-Russian position of the selected political parties. Subsequently, the methodology is described, and the measurement and approaches used are explained. After laying the framework for the research, a

data matrix derived from the theory is designed to examine whether ideological affinity prevails over strategy or vice versa. A comparison will present the similarities and differences between the objects of study. As a final step, an answer to the research question is given, the results are summarised, and an evaluation of the work with an outlook on future research is formulated.

2. Theoretical Framework

Before getting into the methodologies for answering the research questions in the introduction, it is necessary to understand why these questions are essential. The following chapter will present the limited existing research on the connection between German anti-establishment parties and Russia. To be capable of theoretically assessing this phenomenon, party behaviour in terms of office-, vote- and policy-seeking will be explained. Further, Riker's theory of party competition and theories of saliency and particularly, Hobolt's and de Vries's theory of "issue entrepreneurship", complete the theoretical foundation to answer the research question.

2.1 Literature Review: Current State of Research

Since the ambiguity surrounding Germany's liberal status quo is reflected in the argument about the characterisation of its primary competitor, terms like "radical right" and "radical left" and their accompanying political populist tradition are sometimes used interchangeably with terms such as "extreme right" and "far-left" which highlights the loose definition of both party types (Art, 2011). This fluid character is exacerbated further by various geographical and historical divides, as a scholarly examination of the ideology has created a variety of viewpoints on the exact definition of the term. Considering the study's emphasis, it appears appropriate to explore such issues, with scholars examining the anti-establishment parties' viewpoints on Russia as inextricably linked to the decades-long internal discussion over the purpose and aspirations of this particular type of political party (Laruelle, 2015). European populist political tradition actively engages with narrative literature in which Russia plays a crucial role, suggesting that the country is likely to be understood through a narrative lens. Earlier studies show that collaboration between Russia and European anti-establishment parties works particularly well because of shared ideological affiliations.

Furthermore, the Russian narrative is structured in such a way that political parties are drawn to it (Klapsis, 2015). Based on the findings of Klapsis' investigation (2015), the cooperation is developed based on a shared strategy and ideological attraction, which is achieved through favourable coverage in media sources such as RT. Braghiroli and Makarychev (2016) refer to this as trans-ideology. They define it as "an attitude towards boosting political influence by pragmatically and intermittently breaching the boundaries of ideologies and political doctrines" (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016, 214). Klinke (2018) has also noted the radical right's pronounced interest in the core ideas of classical geopolitical thought, as parties readily engage in discourses describing inevitable struggles for power within European developments.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that this discourse has even influenced thinking within Russia. An example is Alexander Dugin's theory of *neo-Eurasianism*, which transforms this eternal "otherness" into virtue through appeals to anti-Western traditionalism (Dugin, 1997). Thus, these temporal and spatial connections involving both European radical right and left ideology and Russia represent an important but understudied theoretical intersection, with such factors only being hinted at in the relevant literature.

To analyse this subject, a suitable and sufficient theoretical foundation may only rely on parts of specific relevant theories. The appearance of such works seems to be directly related to Russia's resurgence on the world stage. Thus, the Political Capital Institute was one of the first contributors to examine the growing ties of the European radical right to Russia in 2009. Claiming that ideology is the main motivation for this emerging affinity, the paper noted that the extreme right increasingly sees Russia as an emerging political ally against a failing Euro-Atlantic consensus. Overall, such research has played a vital role in this ever-reinforcing relationship's emergence and practical purpose. The report by Antonis Klapsis (2015) probably best sums up the significance of these new connections, as the populist parties are able to influence European opinion on key geopolitical events such as Russia's annexation of Crimea or the war in Ukraine. However, it was only then that this relationship became the subject of traditional academic inquiry, with work up to this point lacking a sophisticated theoretical approach. This is evident in Polyakova's investigation (2016), which examined the alliance through the lens of social movement theory. She argues that radical right-wing parties have recently reframed themselves as

champions of anti-EU popular sentiment and notes that this has naturally led to praise for Putin, whose populist illiberalism is seen as the antithesis of Brussels. This understanding of shared traditionalism forms the basis of the radical right's relationship with Moscow and has now become an essential part of the literature. Such an understanding is made particularly clear by Marlene Laruelle (2015). Her work places the aforementioned theory of *neo-Eurasianism* at the centre of this relationship; at the same time, the theoretical depth of the work is complemented by its breadth of cases, with discussions of the fate of beliefs in countries as diverse as France, which strengthens the basis for the international perspective of this study. Although Laurelle's study provides the essential theoretical background for this study, much remains to be explored due to its pioneering nature. However, her study's focus on Dugin himself sometimes seems to obscure the work's relevance to the mainstream, as the work emphasises the marginal nature of his personal network. Finally, it is worth noting Shekhovtsov's significant contribution from 2018 in analysing the Kremlin's leading role in relations with populists and thus outlining how Moscow has integrated the radical right into its resurgent foreign policy.

Nevertheless, such a focus on Russian actions often tacitly portrays the extreme right as non-autonomous. As previously mentioned, there is more study and media coverage on far-right groups' connection to Russia than on far-left parties. Nonetheless, some previous research briefly indicates that both far-right and far-left parties might have common interests with Russia, such as weakening and dissolving the EU. Further, to attract extreme left groups, the Kremlin has relied on comrade networks created during Communist times (Rohac et al., 2017). The European radical left appears to sympathise with the Kremlin's sovereignty rhetoric, functional anti-fascism, and condemnation of the European Union (Braghiroli and Makarychev, 2016). According to Orenstein and Kelemen (2017), Russia has direct contact with several left-wing parties, such as Die Linke in Germany.

2.2.1 Crossing Ideological and Strategic Targets: Anti-Establishment and Russia

There are several views in the academic community as to what determines the attitude of German parties toward Russia. One of the most popular theories is that party ideology, as well as national affiliation, influences the level of attitudes. Bragiroli (2015) divides parties into three groups: those

on the left and right sides of the spectrum and those leaning toward the centre. The first shows the most favourable attitude towards the Russian Federation; the second also shows a positive level. Still, it lags behind its leftist counterparts, while the third, where Bragiroli includes the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, is, on the contrary, characterised by anti-Russian rhetoric. National affiliation remains secondary, except in the case of the Baltics and Poland, which show low levels of trust in the Russian Federation. Despite the broad consensus of opinions on the importance of the influence of the ideological component, some scholars deny the party's political orientation as the key reason for their attitude towards Russia. Onderco (2019) talks about different positions within EU party groups and the lack of systematic correlation between ideology and perception of Russian politics. Even so, there is no denying the pro-Russian views of the most marginal political forces in Europe. Due to its anti-globalisation and anti-Western orientation, Russia's policy remains attractive to the extreme left and extreme right sides of the spectrum.

Moreover, recent studies showed that partisan ideology and its derived narratives indeed drive the approval of military interventions. According to Wagner et al. (2017), in the post-Cold War period, military usage was less linked to a form of conflict and more with the increase of respect for human rights. This contrasts with the Cold War, during which the leftist parties were historically identified as opposition to militarism. This rejection of militarism was sometimes accompanied by appeals for peaceful cohabitation with the Soviet Union and opposition to an aggressive form of foreign policy, which often meant being soft and accommodating toward the Soviet Union. Scholars have suggested that today’s radical left parties, despite being significantly less dominant than their predecessors, continue to hold on to these narratives. Comparing these attitudes toward Russia to attitudes toward the US, Anti-Americanism has a partisan aspect, primarily through attitudes toward militarism and capitalism (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2007). Especially after the end of the Cold War, however, there is no reason to expect significant differences between the parties in their attitudes toward Russia based on party affiliation in the traditional left-right sense. Nevertheless, individual parties’ priorities in their programs may influence their attitudes toward Russia.

Following Braghiroli (2015), liberal parties in the EU that focus on human rights tend to be critical of Russia's human rights record. Considering Russia's recent efforts to position itself as

a champion of sovereign-state cooperation and traditional morality, the assumption is that anti-system parties argue that the West is in decline and that supranational integration has gone too far to be more favourable toward Russia over time. Although far-right parties are frequently connected with such attitudes, moral arguments and the limitations of European integration are not exclusive to far-right parties. This viewpoint is related to Euroscepticism in general, and similar ideas are expressed by what Marks et al. (2006) refer to as TAN parties and GAL parties. As a result, one may predict that the more parties that support the TAN philosophy, the more likely they are to be favourable to Russia because they theoretically share the same values. Consequently, European parties identified with traditional values would be more pro-Russian. Simultaneously, it is possible to predict that the more nationalist parties there are, the more appealing Russia's nationalist message will be. Therefore, we may expect parties ranking high on nationalism or even patriotism to have favourable views of Russia.

To sum up, Table 1 depicts the different types of Russian sympathisers in Europe. According to Braghiroli & Makarychev (2016), two significant parties stand in the centre of interest. The first category of so-called *Putin-Versteher* are left-wing parties. Although it is relevant to note that there are subgroups in which the strength of the connection to Putin's Russia varies to attract extreme left groups, the Kremlin has relied on comrade networks created during Communist times (Rohac et al., 2017). Moreover, similarities are identified in the Kremlin's rhetoric of active anti-fascism, sovereignty, and condemnation of the EU (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016). Far-right parties are defined as the second group of Russian sympathizers. Due to their ideological infatuation with Putin's concept of Russia, a strong encouragement regarding authoritarian political structures toward a nation-state model and against supranational authorities is crucial. Lastly, a less essential group that links to Russia is mentioned because of its ethnic and/or civilisational affinity with Russia. Although clear pro-Russian sentiments can be identified in this group, they rarely take a definite party position. Thus, they are only individual voices promoting sympathy toward Russia. Consequently, these parties cannot be classified as either on the left or right axis.

Tabel 1: Characteristics of Putin-Versteher (after Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016)

	Leftist, neo-Marxist, reformed or non-reformed communist parties	**Far-right, neo-fascists or post-fascists parties**	**Ethnic and/or civilizational affinity with Russia**
Common denomination	Against supranational authorities	Strong identarian appeal in favor of a national state model	presence of a significant Russian minority (Latvia, Estonia)
		Against supranational authorities (Brussels) lambasted for their alleged pro-US stand & immigration friendly	Cultural and religious connections "Russian Orthodox world" (Bulgaria, Greece)
		Anti-gay/homophobic sentiments → In favor of traditional family values	
Position toward EU	Partly Eurosceptic EU = capitalist model needs to have reform ("Europe of banks" vs. "Europe of peoples")	Eurosceptic EU = multicultural unorganized community losing international power	Different opinions

Considering the existence of various typologies of *Putin-Versteher*, this thesis goes beyond the state of the art, i.e., the following theoretical arguments aim to build upon, but also beyond this taxonomy of party behaviour in which parties are in a constant state of competition and to stand out from the other parties, a positive positioning toward Russia is used. The novelty of this paper is that it brings into the discussion not only ideological but also strategic considerations. Ultimately, German Russia-sympathizers are ideologically significantly different (Onderco, 2019), yet Russia manages to maximise external political support through skilled communication methods unaffected by vast ideological disparities. According to Braghiroli and Makarychev (2016), the most common denominator between Russia and the anti-establishment parties is their antagonism to the liberal rhetoric of the EU and NATO (Snegovaya, 2022; Braghiroli, 2015). This highlights that ideology helps explain why the selected parties exhibit similar voting behaviour.

While leftist parties frequently associate the EU and NATO with an American imperialist agenda that endangers world peace and security and damages Germany's relations with Russia, right-wing parties oppose the EU's supranational integration based on liberal and multicultural ideals. Since both oppose European integration, these parties see Russia as a model for a genuinely sovereign and independent country that can assist in counterbalancing US influence over Europe while also helping them in achieving their own countries' independence from Euro-Atlantic institutions (Klapsis, 2015). The approaches to national sovereignty and European integration differ among the far-left groups (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016). Far-left political groups opposed to the EU and European integration are frequently motivated by the belief that the EU is ineffectual and capitalistic. However, they are not opposed to European collaboration per se because they do not support ethnic nationalism as far-right parties do. However, they aim to reform the EU in such a way as to look for further partners besides the U.S. to minimise their own vulnerability.

Such Eurosceptic statements may be blended with various ideologies on both sides of the political spectrum and can thus be used by parties from many ideological groups (Beaudonnet & Gomez, 2017; Golosov, 2020; Taggart, 1998). In other words, Putin's dictatorship and European Russia enthusiasts pragmatically benefit from each other (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016). If confirmed, this result has significant policy consequences for the European response. However, until recently, few quantitative and qualitative attempts have verified this notion.

2.2 Party Behaviour

In this part, existing theories on party behaviour will be discussed and applied to anti-establishment parties since parties are in constant competition. Additionally, this section serves as a basis for the following analysis of what motivates parties in their behaviour and how this might affect the political positioning of anti-establishment parties in the context of issue entrepreneurship. Because research makes three significant differences (office-seeking, policy-seeking, vote-seeking) in the parties' objectives, each is examined from the standpoint of the selected party type and their distinctive characteristics. This categorisation is based on the notion that electoral success is the most effective way to accomplish political gains and that party leaders expressly predict future power increases (Strøm, 1990). Moreover, it is essential to consider that party behaviour is not transparent. Thus, the boundaries between different schemes of motivations and the resulting

behaviour can be blurred, causing empirical expectations to overlap. Consequently, parties can simultaneously be motivated by various goals, which is crucial.

2.2.1 Components of Political Behaviour

Office-seeking is distinguished by parties' ambitions for different benefits in political office (Müller & Strøm, 1999). According to Riker (1962), it is assumed that the motivation of party behaviour is based solely on the certainty of winning, leading to executive control. Research on other parties has shown that established parties have advantages in future elections, as their political effectiveness is usually higher than politicians without an office (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015). The pursuit of this place in government can be explained by intrinsic motivations or the instrumental capacity to influence political outcomes while in office. Ultimately, the reasons for parties to seek office remains usually unknown, which is why research orient mainly on parties' behaviour when seeking office (Müller & Strøm, 1999).

Policy-seeking is determined by a type of party behaviour dictated by the ability to impact public policy (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Contrary to office-seeking, parties endeavour to modify public policy in accordance with their ideas and values. Interestingly, in multi-level governance like the German federal state system, parties must make political compromises when they enter coalitions. Their core motivation is predicted as the result of such policy measures. Like office-seeking, policy-seeking can also be motivated by intrinsic reasons and instrumental purposes owing to personal gains linked with a specific policy. Moreover, this type is merged by ideological interests, government portfolios, and party behaviour, resulting in unsolved compromises.

According to Budge and Laver (1986), policy-seeking is the least developed type of party behaviour because combining ideological interests and governmental responsibilities results in almost unresolvable compromises. Finally, in examining party behaviour, both office-& policy-seeking frequently intersect and cannot be rigidly separated (Budge & Laver, 1986). Several predictions can be established based on the characteristics above concerning the influence of this type of behaviour on the political alignment of anti-establishment parties. In this party behaviour typology, ideology's role is of particular relevance. That ideological doctrine leads to a consistent policy that a party aspires for is essential for aligning political stances. As mentioned earlier, anti-establishment parties oppose a society's conventional economic, political, and social principles, as reflected in their policy formulation. Even though this group differs from mainstream parties'

ideological values, scholars paid little attention to the importance of unrealistic perceptions. Thus, the assumption arose that anti-establishment parties are thought to develop and condemn problems without giving meaningful political views to resolve these disputes, complicating conclusions on politically driven party behaviour.

Lastly, vote-seeking is classified as the third component of party behaviour. This typology relies on vote maximisation to obtain support from potential voters and thus dominate government and expand authority, income, and reputation (Downs, 1957). However, this absolute maximisation of votes is not based on intrinsic goals, unlike office - & policy-seeking, but only on instrumental means (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Nevertheless, a clear cut between the typologies is not evident. Maximising votes can also be understood as a tool for policy-seeking or office-seeking, even if, in the latter case, maximising parties' probabilities might be more sufficient than focusing on votes. Therefore, intersections of all components are possible and probable. For anti-establishment parties, vote-seeking is essential because one strategy is to provide simple solutions that address complex problems. Assuming that those types of parties tend to polarise with their behaviour and less in seeking to formulate constructive policies, as their ideological affiliation is considered thin-centred (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), an analysis of the intra-party coherence of positions might reveal a lower level compared to mainstream parties. Lastly, the pursuit of votes is one of the main goals of political parties (Downs, 1957; Müller & Strøm, 1999); thus, they have a motive to promote previously overlooked issues if they feel that it would increase their share of the vote (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015). For a better overview, Table 2 summarises the main characteristics of party behaviour, including the three typologies, the communication strategy, target audience and the way the message is formulated.

Table 2: Characteristics of Party Behaviour (after Römmele 2003)

	Communication strategy	**Target audience**	**Message**
Office-seeking	Top-down	Voters	Personalized on candidate
Policy-seeking	Top-down & bottom-up	Target group	Policy
Vote-seeking	Top down	Voters	Personalized on candidate

2.3 Party Competition Theory after Riker

As the last part explicitly mentioned three components of political loss of parties in multi-level governance, the following paragraph presents theories of party strategies when competing to convince and determine relevant issues for parties and voters. However, this study is aware of the existence of spatial logic theories and their ability to explain parties' behaviour. Yet, the choice of specific issues is limited as it concentrates more on the proximity between parties and voters while assuming that issues are fixed and known, which in the context of the Ukraine crisis and its almost daily developments is challenging to apply and will thus be excluded from the theoretical foundation. This paper will distinguish between two conceptions of party competition: spatial logic theories and issue-based theories.

Riker's concept follows the idea of *heresthetic*, which means that a specific situation is set in order to motivate potential voters to join. Consequently, this has an electoral advantage for the party that positively structures the selected issue (Riker, 1996). There are three proposed strategies that parties might adopt to increase their chances of winning: The first is strategic voting, meaning abstaining from the favoured choice to obtain the desired result. The second is agenda control, which is the capacity to arrange the items to be voted on in such an order that the preferred choice wins. Third, dimension manipulation is also known as selecting and utilising new issues to produce smaller majorities for the opposition and more significant majorities for the own party (Riker, 1996). As previously stated, issues are supplementary to create dimensions that voters may apply to simplify their comprehension of the current state of political affairs. However, Carmines and Stimson (1989) argue that even though a party alliance is built on an agreement on some issues, "beneath the surface are myriad potential problems that can divide the party faithful and lead to the dissolution of the existing balance" (Carmines & Stimson, 1989, 9). Thus, by integrating new issues that do not precisely fit these dimensions and their underlying issues might be rearranged.

In principle, rhetoric is undoubtedly a crucial component of party competition. Parties strive to move people closer to their ideas by emphasising frames that benefit them, employing methods like those utilised in issue saliency theories presented in the next paragraph. Thus, the following section will show different notions of saliency and the issue entrepreneurship theory, which will add to the understanding of the used theoretical framework for this paper.

2.4 Saliency and Issue Entrepreneurship Theories

Since both theories reject the conception of space in party competition, the focus lies more on the one-positional issue like "corruption" (Budge, 2015). According to these theories, parties compete not to discover the optimal position on a dimension but to impose an issue on which they have a competitive advantage because they are viewed as better capable of dealing with it than the other parties. Party competition is thus focused on which party has the most robust reputation on the issues people use to make their voting decisions, rather than comparing the parties' viewpoints on the many disputes. In the case of incumbents, party reputations on issues are influenced by performance records and longer-term impressions of the parties' traditional voters and leaders and their traditional priorities (Budge & Farlie 1983). Manipulation through the media or other forms of communication is used to push specific issues over others (Abbe et al., 2003; Carmines & Stimson, 1986), for instance, by shifting the importance and intensity of the sentiments related to the issues or the expectation of polarisation among parties surrounding the issue (de Vries et al. 2009).

Relevant is the assumption that citizens have set principles and beliefs but no explicit opinions, which means that provided information affects how they think about an issue. In this context, parties are not able to change voters' perceptions of which issues are essential and who is most capable of addressing them; there may be some room for them to influence and interpret the facts according to their ideological affiliation, which later will be made accessible to voters when making their selection. Further, empirical analysis of party strategies and manifestos (De Sio & Weber, 2014) shows that issue entrepreneurship[2] can influence vote choice when political parties define their policies by emphasising specific issues more than others (Budge, 2015).

There exist two sources in which this issue usage arises: a connection between party priorities and incentives located among the specific issue (Egan, 2013); or a reference to an agreement including the parties' performance around a winning issue (Meyer & Müller, 2013). Following Petrocik (1996), the reasons for issue entrepreneurship may come from the two

[2] In academic literature, the term issue entrepreneurship is more often used issue ownership. The reason for this is the assumption that parties can "own" an issue, however, in recent years different parties are increasingly mentioning the same issues by interpreting and providing information for their political advantage, as is the case with pro-Russian sentiments in German anti-establishment parties. Therefore, this paper refers to issue entrepreneurship, as more suitable definition regarding mechanisms in internal party goals.

possibilities. Even though both sources have been included in studies of issue evolution, both types have various implications for party strategies. Party priorities are likely less influenced by ideological affinity, but party leaders can use a dynamic space to modify values and priorities in a certain way. Thus, parties can either choose whether to promote a winning issue or not and how intensive the focus should be put on that issue. Moreover, it should be visible that the parties' choice for selecting and focusing on issues lies in the sole power of the party and thus, nothing is taken as given, as usually presumed by issue studies (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015). The second source emphasises party performance, which depends on parties' actions since their existence in scandals and electoral outcomes. This sphere is mostly beyond their control, but perceptions are likely influenced by party affiliation and other ideological factors (Stubager & Slothuss, 2013). When issue priorities are integrated into policy areas, and there is considerable disagreement over whose program is superior, the parties' emphasis on various topics is interpreted significantly in terms of geographical positioning (van der Brug, 2004). In the case of German anti-establishment parties, the AfD and Die Linke do not directly oppose each other's pro-Russian sentiments. However, they do not hesitate in their viewpoints on the type of appropriate governance and ideological aspirations. In conclusion, while the reputational of the parties in connection to the issue should be paid less focus, examining how far parties may profit with the selection of the issue in political competition is important.

The strategy of issue entrepreneurship is inherently dangerous for parties because mobilising such issues can destabilise parties from within, put off potential voters and jeopardise future coalition talks (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015). Yet, issue entrepreneurship has the capacity to reshape political competition, resulting in electoral success. Along with this theory, it is expected that parties in *losing* positions in the dominating dimension of political competition, such as the selected anti-establishment parties, serve as issue entrepreneurs, playing a vital role in politicising issues (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015). Interestingly, although losers in a two-party system are simply identified as the opposing parties, the difference between winners and losers is less evident in multiparty systems, particularly identified by coalition governments like the German political system. Thus, Hobolt and de Vries (2015) developed a construct of "political loss" (p.1161) based on the goals of the three above presented typologies of party competition: office-, policy- and vote-seeking. Political loss is defined by the lack of experience in government, distance to average party position in dominating dimension of party competition, and electoral defeat. Parties that are

"losers" in multiparty systems hold a minority viewpoint on the dominating dimension of political disputes, have never held political office, and have been defeated in elections.

On the contrary, political "winners" are interested in maintaining current patterns of political struggle because of their overall beneficial position (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015). Since thy regularly rotate between government and opposition, assuming winning and majority positions within the system, making them unlikely to act as issue entrepreneurs. Therefore, issue entrepreneurs are defined by a disadvantaged status in the political system. Based on this, they tend to mobilise issues that might disrupt the political balance to gain an electoral benefit (Hobolt & de Vries, 2012; 2015). In this study, the theoretical assumptions are tested by investigating the dynamics of issue selection concerning pro-Russian sentiments promoted by German anti-establishment parties. Pro-Russian narratives used by this type of party provide an essential testing ground for three reasons. First of all, ideological proximity and fascination with Putin's Russia is a crucial aspect for anti-establishment parties to promote further ties with the country to strengthen their own strategic position. Second, this idea of enhancing German-Russian cooperation is guided by concrete issues such as promoting the nation-state. Thus, it is relevant for this study to explore to what extent the parties mention specific alternatives or merely leave it at abstract demands to appeal to potential voters. The latter would suggest that the parties only pursue strategic goals behind a pro-Russian position, as they would lack clear arguments and implementation plans, unlike ideological consideration. Third, there are allegations that active ties with the Russian elite are an essential ingredient for strengthening the own partisan position of German anti-establishment parties. Thus, an attempt could be made to find signs of such a connection in this study. However, there is little evidence to support this hypothesis currently, which limits the assessment of the relevance of this connection to the ideological or policy goals of German anti-establishment parties.

2.5 Relevance of Ideological Affiliation

The ideological affinity toward Russia must be considered when identifying anti-establishment parties as vote-seekers. As previously mentioned, the study by Braghiroli and Makarychev (2016), offers first insights into why both anti-establishment parties are deemed to have comparable aims with Russia while being on opposite extremes of the political left-right spectrum. According to

them, it is crucial for Russia to have partners within the EP who can help shape pro-Russian narratives. Finally, they concluded that these parties are more sensitive to Russian influence than mainstream parties. This is consistent with this thesis' fundamental assumption that ideological affiliation is seen as a key element between the two actors. Based on previous studies (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016; Onderco; 2019; Snegovaya, 2015), although the ideological affiliations of the examined parties are fundamentally different, some similar ideological approaches were identified, which are used for the analysis of the first hypothesis. Four areas of joint ideological affiliation[3] have been identified throughout the theoretical background. Thus, the dimensions of the common discourse are: 1) *Anti-Westernism*, which includes a reluctance to cooperate with the U.S. and transatlantic organisations such as NATO, 2) *Dislike of the supranational construct of the EU* in the form of different expressions of Euroscepticism, 3) *Conservatism*, regarding traditional values and family constructions, 4) *Nationalism* in the form the strengthening the own sovereignty and the increasing respect of national interests. Following Braghiroli and Makarychev (2016), those parties focus on certain realities and fears attached to the areas. Regarding the realities, the romanticisation of the past of the nation-state is one of the main aspects. However, this is under threat from developments in globalisation, immigration and, finally, U.S. hegemony, and can be revoked through increased ties with Russia. Interestingly, while anti-establishment parties have a negative position on developments that emerged through Westernism and the EU, the positions on conservative positioning in terms of family structures and nationalism meaning are increasingly divergent. This paper aims to project the correctness of this result onto the German anti-establishment parties and ultimately determine to what extent ideological proximity to Russia can explain the pro-Russian sentiments.

As the theoretical framework already states, ideological affiliations enable parties to modify their position regarding closer relations with certain countries (Budge et al. 1987). The discussion above shows that the connection between Russia and German anti-establishment parties is mainly based on ideology. This generates the following hypothesis.

[3] A graphic presentation can be found in table 3, which shows the four ideological areas as well as the position of the AfD and die Linke.

H1: German anti-establishment parties have a pro-Russian position due to a profound ideological affinity with the Russian government under Putin.

2.6 Relevance of Strategic Positioning

As it is known, the right strategy might lead political parties. Besides the national affiliation, this thesis explores what conditions or how the selection of an issue, in this case, "pro-Russian sentiments", is used in such a way that leads to an electoral advantage for the anti-establishment parties. Different contexts, especially during a crisis independently from a national or international crisis, may cause a shift in the position of a party. As Hobolt and de Vries (2015) mentioned, parties are in a competition in which the differentiation is made between winners and losers. Since the latter has no government experience, the willingness to use specific topics defined as "issues" in the literature for their own gain is more considerable (de Vries & Hobolt, 2015, 2020). However, a specific liberté de manoeuvre enables the parties to reconcile internal party goals with strategy. Thus, the strategic approach is essential while also requiring some adaptation to current circumstances. Unlike Klapsis (2015), this paper considers the option that even if ideology and strategy are interrelated, a shift in the form of divergence of partisan ideologies may be discernible. This shift can be made visible in particular, through the effects and changes of a crisis. Thus, it is argued that anti-establishment parties place their electoral advantage over their profound internal ideologies. Focusing on central contexts during the Ukraine crisis, it is expected that further developments might lead to shifts in the position toward Russia. However, in politics, strategies are connected and even interrelated to specific goals such as economic, societal, security and political objectives. Based on the knowledge gained above, the following hypothesis is formulated.

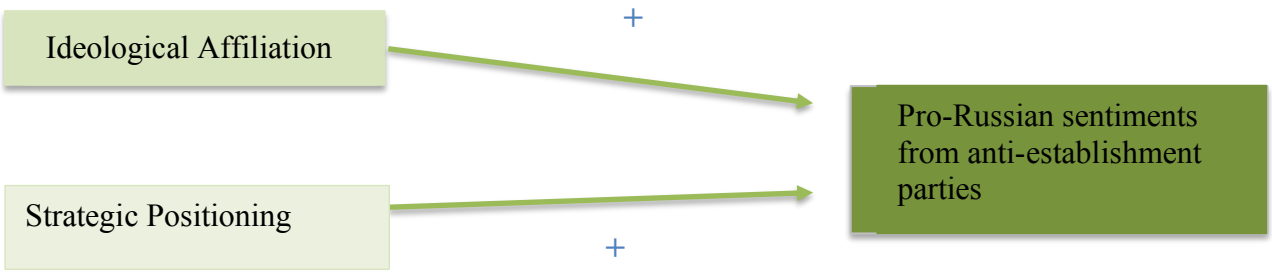
H2: German anti-establishment parties with a pro-Russian position use it to strategically differentiate themselves from other parties and thus attract new voters.

2.7 Causal Relation

As mentioned above, the relationship between Russia and German anti-establishment parties, namely Die Linke and AfD, is central to this research. The reason for a party favouring the Russian government is a unique research topic analysed for the first time in this form. It is expected that due to the disadvantageous position in governance experiences, anti-establishment parties prefer

to polarise, increasing voters' attention. Although mainstream parties also show concessions toward Russia under certain circumstances, investigating the cases in which both "fringe" parties use pro-Russian sentiment is essential. On the one hand, the ideological component is a source, as similarities between Russian and German left- and right-wing parties in terms of aversion to certain forms of international cooperation and thus the convergence and strengthening of their national potential is discernible. On the other hand, the question of strategy is also relevant: Because of the constant party competition, the successful recruitment of members is significant. Polarising positions that appeal to the minority and suit the ideological perceptions seem to be an appropriate tool. However, what if, due to international events, the view of a country changes so dramatically that parties must react in a short time to as not to alienate voters? The paper assumes that ideology takes a back seat from this moment on, and strategic action is in the foreground. Thus, as can be seen below, it is presumed that both hypotheses (ideology (H1) and strategic positions (H2)) favour pro-Russian sentiments for their own sake and, therefore, serve to a certain extent as explaining elements of the ties between Russia and German anti-establishment parties.

Figure 1: Causal path diagram of H1 & H2



3. Research Design and Methodology

To carry out the envisaged analysis, the following chapter provides an overview of the research design and the methodology used to measure the relevant variables. In addition, possible limits of measurement will be mentioned.

3.1 Research Design

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper aims to examine the positions of German anti-establishment parties toward Russia while comparing the similarities and differences between both parties in different contexts. The importance of further study on this topic stems from the new

phenomenon of ties between German anti-establishment and Russia but, in particular, on the specific similarities and differences in the positioning of the pro-Russian sentiment of two ideologically different party types. Since section 2 serves as a foundation, outlining how connections are used as a subject/issue for profiling the own party and why this is significant in party competition, general party behaviour was highlighted, namely office-, policy-, or vote-seeking. Although the academic landscape is limited to relevant results concerning the two formulated hypotheses, the use of ideology and/or strategy can give a first impression of how parties influence their potential electorate by using pro-Russian sentiments and what kind of international developments might shift party's position on specific topics.

Research Question

The central research question, "What positions have German anti-establishment parties taken vis-à-vis the Russian government under Vladimir Putin since 2013, and how can the commonalities and differences between these positions be explained?" is descriptive and explanatory. On the one hand, the thesis aims to describe the connection between the two selected parties within Russia between 2013 and now. On the other hand, the goal is to find an explanation for the positions, especially the differences between the positions, both between the parties and over time. Finally, this research topic integrates advantages of the international connections between German anti-establishment parties and Russia, incorporating theories about party competition and issue entrepreneurship. Applying these notions to the German political landscape gives practical insights into the AfD's and Die Linke's party behaviour during competition situations and examines possible schemes of using pro-Russian sentiments as an issue for their electoral benefits. This research question can be expanded in the future to include different party families and governance systems.

Units of Analysis

The units of analysis are small and specific, namely Die Linke and AfD, while Russia is the topic of the party discourse. The study compares positions formulated by both German parties toward Russia regarding their electoral or reputational profit for the parties. Thus, the approach for this analysis is comparative and qualitative. A comprehensive overview of the parties' positioning,

debates, speeches, and election manifestos from the past nine years serves as material. According to Thomassen (1994), political party behaviour is influenced by statements in election manifestos. Therefore, these manifestos are written expressions of the parties' viewpoints; however, to identify and compare a more diverse and precise, although controversial positioning, verbal remarks by some of the parties' politicians in the form of speeches and debates are also included. Following Däubler (2012), election manifestos lack a shared agenda or framework, implying a more decentralised election manifesto formation and party organisation approach. The manifestos' large variety confirms this in length and between both parties. While the AfD has manifestos ranging from 860 words (FE, 2013) to 29213 terms (FE, 2021), Die Linke uses significantly more words; the range goes from 32174 words (EE, 2019) to 76111 words (FE, 2021).

As this study provides two hypotheses, one which focuses on the ideological affiliation of a party and one which aims to emphasise that parties only behave in terms of their strategy and thus, under certain circumstances in the face of the Ukraine crisis, they tend to change their position regarding of their ideological parallels to Russia. Consequently, an ideological matrix is designed to analyse comments made either in the manifestos or during speeches emphasising common ideological ground with Russia. Based on the theoretical framework presented above, four ideological points of convergence are identified and depicted in Table 3. To test the first hypothesis, this table serves as an orientation that gives insight into the position within the party concerning the selected ideological areas. Throughout the analysis, statements on the respective ideological views are to be assigned and categorized. In addition, the time frame in which these statements were made is relevant, which is why this is also included in citations and the final matrix.

Table 3: Ideological Points of Convergence between German anti-establishment parties and Russia (after Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016)

	Anti-Westernism	**Anti-EU**	**Conservatism**	**Nationalism**
Far-left	Consonant	Consonant	Radically divergent	Controversial
Far-right	Consonant	Consonant	Largely consonant	Consonant

Since this study deals with a specific topic which is followed by a huge research gap, the second hypothesis is also elaborated using a unique approach. It is assumed that the strategic behaviour of the party can be examined over time. Thus, five key events of the Ukraine crisis help to identify to what extent the relationship with Russia is really based on ideological convictions or was merely a strategic calculation on the part of the parties. Table 4 provides the opportunity to compare the relevant events as well as the type of strategy, which should better clarify the categorisation of the quotes during the coding and analysis phase. As already mentioned, five key events were selected during the Ukraine crisis to identify an actual position vis-à-vis Russia. The comparison over a more extended period of time considers seeing a shift within the parties if their position changes due to the developments in the crisis; this indicates that in electoral terms, they should see a disadvantage in this position and thus have only followed a strategic consideration.

Table 4: Strategy as a vote-winning tool for parties

	Status of Crimea (03/2014)		War in Eastern Ukraine (03/2014)		Minsk II (02/2015)		Sanctions against Russia (since 2014)		War in Ukraine (02/2022)	
	AfD	*Die Linke*	*AfD*	*Die Linke*	*AfD*	*Die Linke*	*AfD*	*Die Linke*	*AfD*	*Die Linke*
Economic strategy	***TBD***									
Societal strategy										
Security strategy										
Political strategy										

This paper goes beyond strategy as a voter outreach tool by classifying the different types of strategies. It distinguishes between four different types in the analysis (economic, societal, security, political). In this context, it is already necessary to consider possible interconnectedness

between the types, which is why in the analysis, certain passages are marked in two or more types of strategies (see appendix 7a-7e). The first strategy concentrates on statements demonstrating economic advantages through a better relationship with Russia. It will be operationalised through statements linked to concrete examples such as Nord Stream 2, which might be frequently highlighted as economic rapprochement to Russia while denying that Russia can increase its influence over Europe. Yet, also, ideas of general economic alliances with Russia demonstrate economic strategies followed by the respective politician of an anti-establishment party. Thereby, the extent to which the statements present substantial financial aspects of the rapprochement with Russia will be examined in the following. In terms of strategic statements around societal questions, arguments which follow the vision of social advantages through the cooperation with Russia either inner German societal group such as the German-Russian community (Russlanddeutsche or Spätaussiedler*innen) or the consideration of the Russian society. Thus, this party is operationalised by the question of how a positive attitude toward Russia has a social advantage for German society. Accusations of misgovernance and the recording of the suffering of Russian society as a result of the sanctions policy, for example, are already intended to illustrate the social principles. The third type; security strategy, is defined as part of a strategy in which fear and enemy are key to clearly demonstrating the wrongdoings of the German government. For the operationalization comments that urge international cooperation with Russia as the only possible option to ensure global peace and security level are identified and coded. Since the analysis is carried out in the context of the Ukraine crisis, in which military interventions are increased, it is assumed that this area of strategy is frequently addressed in order to justify the positive position and strengthen the West's image as an enemy. Lastly, the political strategy can be seen as protruding typology since it addresses the systematic expansion of Germany's political capacities on different stages. In this case, the statements are formulated in a more general way, i.e., no concrete ideas are mentioned; however, different feelings such as lack of understanding, anger but also fear are to be used in a targeted manner in order to strengthen the topics open at the beginning, which lack concreteness, yet in terms of importance. In this way, comments are made for the operationalisation, which focuses on the general improvement of Germany. Here, one could assume statements that aim to strengthen Germany on the international level and thus portray the West as an enemy that deliberately restricts Germany's freedom out of fear of a conflict with Russia.

3.2 Case Selection

Since the thesis deals with a narrowed scope of qualitative data and includes a precise setting, a small-N study (N=2) is conducted. Because of comparable party systems and historical experiences, anti-establishment parties are frequently researched within Western Europe; although this was considered, due to the limited scope of this thesis, it was abandoned. Therefore, German anti-establishment parties, AfD and Die Linke[4] have been picked. It has been a practical necessity to focus on Germany for several reasons. First, both show to a certain extent some similarities in terms of ideological affiliation and strategic behaviour. The two parties have extremely different ideologies. Nevertheless, Russia is able to positively address both types of ideological beliefs, which underlines the importance of this study.

Furthermore, both parties have never been part of the German federal government. Hobolt and de Vries (2015) assume that such types of parties have less inhibition to use controversy, also known as "issues", strategically. The view of Russia is still controversial in German society. Both the AfD and Die Linke see this as an opportunity to polarise and thus, use the pro-Russian narrative as a vote-winning tool. Second, historically, certain left-wing politicians have (from the time of the GDR and the Soviet Union) still had good contacts with Russia. Die Linke is a successor party to the SED, which emerged from the old communist networks and structures still in place during the Soviet era. Thus, many politicians of Die Linke idealise these ancient times and communism, even though Russia has not been communist for a long time.

Nevertheless, many people in East Germany are still connected to Russia. In the period after reunification, many East Germans perceived the West as arrogant, and there were overlaps with another large group on Die Linke, especially with the position of the USA on the international level. Finally, anti-Americanism becomes central, with Putin posing as a saviour against America's superiority. Thus, this mixture ultimately leads to a solid pro-Russian faction driven above all by the desire to be able to empathise with the U.S. In the AfD, the longing for the strong man, the contempt for democratic values, the view of family, and the question of homosexuality are focused on Putin, who is seen as a leading figure by many AfD politicians. This marginal role will, in the AfD's view, "clean up" the sclerotic West. Moreover, these values are also well received by many Russian Germans. In addition, there are some opaque connections directly to the Kremlin. The AfD has been suspected of receiving party donations from Russia for years. Leaked emails suggest

[4] A brief description of the parties is provided in appendix 1.

that the Kremlin allegedly controlled AfD politicians. When comparing the two parties, it can be stated that despite ideological differences, the similarities in hatred towards the USA, NATO and European integration lead to the hope of establishing an alliance with Putin and thus being able to introduce the separation from the EU and NATO.

Thus, the reasons above justify the decision to choose this unique phenomenon and case. Moreover, the cases are identified as the *most-different systems design* (George & Bennett, 2005) as this research method examines maximally diverse examples on all but the variable of interest (Anckar, 2008). In this thesis, systems are German anti-establishment parties, in particular, AfD and Die Linke, which are different terms of ideological affiliation but are similar with regard to the dependent variables, i.e., pro-Russian sentiments. Applying this method helps in identifying independent variables that presumably determine the difference in the dependent variable and, in the process, explains why different political ideologies produce similar forms of relationships between the anti-establishment parties and Russian state officials and political elites in their intensity and importance. However, it is essential to explore the nature of such a relationship for the parties. Scholars such as Laurelle (2015) or Onderco (2019) are convinced that this is more a relationship of confluence and less one of influence. This paper, therefore, aims not only to explore the respective parties' positions but also to try to identify the "real" goals of this relationship for the party.

3.3 Data Collection

Since the units of observation are election manifestos and speeches supplemented by scientific articles, purposeful sampling strategies were used to select relevant documents. For election manifestos, the data is available on the parties' websites in their original version and in some translated versions such as Russian, English, French etc. The literature search focuses on nine years (2013-2022). However, problems occurred in the collection as not all parties had comprehensive manifestos available. Thus, manifestos and parliamentary speeches[5] were analysed for the presence of references to Russia during the content analysis. Finally, this paper analyses

[5] For the analysis, a translation made by the researcher providing a sufficient knowledge of the English language it is ensured that o loss of information will occur in order to carry out the analysis within the German context.

five manifestos[6] and ten speeches per party; thus, the definite number of conducted data is 30 documents (see appendix 2 & 5). Notable is that data collection on AfD speeches was more complicated than those of Die Linke. Unfortunately, the AfD's website did not have an archive for viewing speeches in written form (only press releases, statements, and videos). Consequently, relevant speeches were retrieved from the Bundestag website. The speeches are selected to match the five selected events in which two speeches from each party relate to one event. Further, the speeches were chosen based on the frequency with which the event was mentioned in the speech and the reference terms used, such as "Russia," "Putin," "Crimea," "Ukraine," "War," and "Zelenskyy," which were searched for in the German language. For secondary literature, data is retrieved through databases like JSTOR, Web of Science, and Scopus were only used to verify common positions of the cases but not as the main material for empirical analysis. In this study, academic literature compares and verifies statements found in the policy papers. In contrast, manifestos and speeches are identified as the empirical material for this research. However, following Cronin et al. (2008), inclusion criteria[7] are essential to select the most relevant articles concerning the research question. The resulting dataset uses a codebook of 21 codes in total that are divided into main groups and subgroups (see appendix 6). The qualitative research software Atlas.ti was utilised to analyse the sampled documents. During this process, some codes (already existed before the analysis) are excluded, whereas new codes (during the research) are included. However, the researcher is aware that through the inclusion criteria mentioned below, an underrepresentation of specific views might be lacking as well as biased opinions since it is a highly politicised topic that cannot be excluded or ignored.

3.4 Data Analysis

In the realm of qualitative data analysis, sources of written media content are assessed, providing different alternative explanations and mechanisms to examine the position of two German anti-establishment parties toward Russia. Those alternative explanations and mechanisms were

[6] Three of the manifestos are national ones prepared for the federal elections in Germany for the years 2013, 2017, 2021. The other two manifestos have been prepared for the European elections in 2014 and 2019.

[7] Thus, articles will only be included in the data if: a) they include an abstract; b) include at least two of the search terms in the title or abstract; and c) articles are written in German or English.

identified and analysed using categorisation strategies to facilitate a comparison between various sources (speeches, scientific articles) (Maxwell, 2009). Two hypotheses were tested to examine similarities and differences between the units of observation. Both hypotheses seek to explore pro-Russian sentiments emphasised by Die Linke and AfD and, respectively, their incentives to promote this position. A coding frame was created to test these hypotheses for categorising the data. Because this is a descriptive and exploratory study, the coding system only includes the core theoretical ideas. Since multiple (sub)categories were expected to arise during the data analysis, these concept-driven codes provided a starting point for the investigation. As a result, data-driven codes are expected to shed light on other issues, such as the phenomenon of a solid favourable position toward Russia coming from these two selected cases.

Consequently, the first stage sorted relevant quotes from party manifestos into previously defined categories. As these categories were not expected to provide a complete picture of all essential characteristics available in the data, additional categories were created to complete the assessment of these two German party opinions toward Russia. This examination of party manifestos is supplemented by analysing speeches of relevant AfD or Die Linke politicians on the subject. Comparing the key topics retrieved from the chosen sources allowed for an assessment of the party's stance on pro-Russian attitudes. Thus, table 4 in the appendix contains an overview of the employed coding system. It differentiates between deductively and inductively formed categories and gives overarching themes that may be extracted from the study. Therefore, the pieces link categories and are discussed in the fourth chapter of this paper.

3. 5 Operationalisation and Conceptualization

For this research, the concepts and dimensions of the variables ‘pro-Russian position’, ‘ideological affiliation’, and ‘strategic positioning’ are defined, conceptualised, and operationalised[8]. The dependent variable is the pro-Russian position of German anti-establishment parties, which is motivated by several foci. The variable's measurement level is categorical because of the level of strength of this position, so either the parties have a solid pro-Russian position or a weaker position compared to the other party. The independent variables are ideological affiliation and strategic positioning chosen by the party. For both variables, the measurement level is categorical.

[8] For a summarized version of the operationalisation of all three variables see appendix 3.

For this study, the dependent variable 'pro-Russian position' needs to be conceptualised. Generally, a 'pro-position' describes an initially supportive stance towards the Russian government in this case. Since this work is located within political contexts, the politically motivated aspects connected with Russia are particularly essential. Based on previous studies, regardless of the ideological leanings, anti-establishment parties tend to hold an optimistic standpoint on Russia's policy more than supporters of mainstream parties (Snegovaya, 2022). The positioning of the selected cases reflects the written presentation in the form of program mainfestos and the verbal positions of individual politicians on behalf of their respective parties, which are complemented in oral form by means of speeches. Even though it is not the only way to perceive a pro-Russian position, since the study's scope is limited, qualitative content analysis is used to illuminate the process of pro-Russian sentiments and to highlight changes in the positioning toward Russia. It consolidates the selected data by providing light on the concept of interest offered in the research question, which is included in the coding scheme in different categories. However, this categorisation decreases the details of the investigated material, but it makes comparisons, and, as a result, the analysis is reliable and more accessible (Schreier, 2012). Relevant is that in the context of the theoretical framework of issue entrepreneurship in party competition by Hobolt and de Vries (2015), parties seek to polarise through their views on Russia that differ from the mainstream. Thus, this thoroughly supportive view of Putin's Russia is seen as an elected issue that must be frequently highlighted and its competence and reputation enhanced in such a way that it appeals to additional voters. Since the pro-Russian positioning is thus the issue, the research question formulated is the target question for this analysis. The first step is a descriptive examination of the positions of both parties. In a further exploratory step, an attempt is made to place these differences and commonalities in an overarching context in order to interpret the mechanisms that could be driving the parties. Besides the ten election manifestos between 2013 and 2022, parliamentary speeches between 2014 and 2022 and academic literature are also used to emphasise possible schemes of change in the chosen position over time.

The first independent variable 'ideological affiliation' defines the aspects which dominate a pro-Russian position. In general, the ideological affiliations of political parties provide information about what kind of policies they would pursue if they were in power (Hooghe, 2007).

According to Gunther and Diamond (2003), parties can sometimes be ranked by ideology using a left-right political continuum (see appendix 4). Other common axes used to compare the ideologies of political parties range from liberal to authoritarian and from establishment-oriented to anti-establishment (Gunther & Diamond, 2003). Since ideologies also distinguish parties from one another, allowing voters to choose the party that represents the policies they prefer, anti-establishment parties in Germany see an opportunity to emphasize their sympathy for Russia but refer to ideological parallels to the Russian system thus strengthening and ultimately justifying their stance. In order to be capable of operationalizing this variable, four types of ideological steam have been chosen: anti-westernism, anti-EU, conservatism, and nationalism. By testing the first hypothesis which questions the extent to which a profound ideological affinity to Russia under Putin explains a positive position toward the Russian government. Due to the range of ideological differences, this variable is identified as categorical. The variable is operationalised using election manifestos (2013-2019). However, the complete picture of the aspects will only be achieved through the inclusion of parliamentary speeches as they allow for more depth regarding appropriate incentives.

The second variable 'strategic positioning' follows the definition that because of various results showing that most parties have taken extreme positions rather than mainstream positions, those parties also choose which voters to campaign among (Glazer, 2002). In this paper, it is assumed that the AfD and Die Linke choose an extreme position to reduce the effectiveness of campaigns against it and cause a large party to campaign against another large party rather than against itself. Similar to the first independent variable, this variable is separated into typologies. Thus, this study differentiates between economic-driven, security-driven, political-driven, and societal-driven strategies. Although these types are likely interconnected, it is the most suitable to make these variables tangibles and comprehensible for the analysis. The variable is tested by examining the extent to which parties use the pro-Russian position to differ their viewpoints from other parties and simultaneously aim to attract new voters while maintaining their usual electorate. Moreover, due to its limited scope, the paper is unable to concentrate on the full development of the Ukraine crisis. Thus, it is chosen to select five key events (War in Eastern Ukraine, Status of Crimea, Minsk II, Sanctions Policy against Russia, War in Ukraine in order to explore possible

shifts in the positioning in terms of their strategy. The variable is operationalised using mainly parliamentary speeches purposely selected by emphasising different dates, if possible. The information is supplemented by academic articles as well as the chosen election manifestos.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

Before proceeding, the issues of reliability and validity must be addressed. Generally, reliability emphasises that "a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, yields the same results each time" (Babbie, 2010, 150). More precisely, sufficient reliability implies that no random errors occur during variable coding and that phrases with the same content are coded similarly (Esaiasson et al., 2017, 64). Although it is complicated to guarantee complete reliability of the "purpose of explaining" (Golafshani, 2003, 601), ensuring that all relevant aspects of the concept are included in qualitative content analyses remains essential. Thus, the content was reviewed several times before and after coding to prevent random errors and miscoding. Throughout the study, the researcher later returned to previously coded content to ensure that the same, or comparable, suggestions were coded in the same way. As a result, the information and data have been verified numerous times for errors committed by the author to avoid tunnel vision.

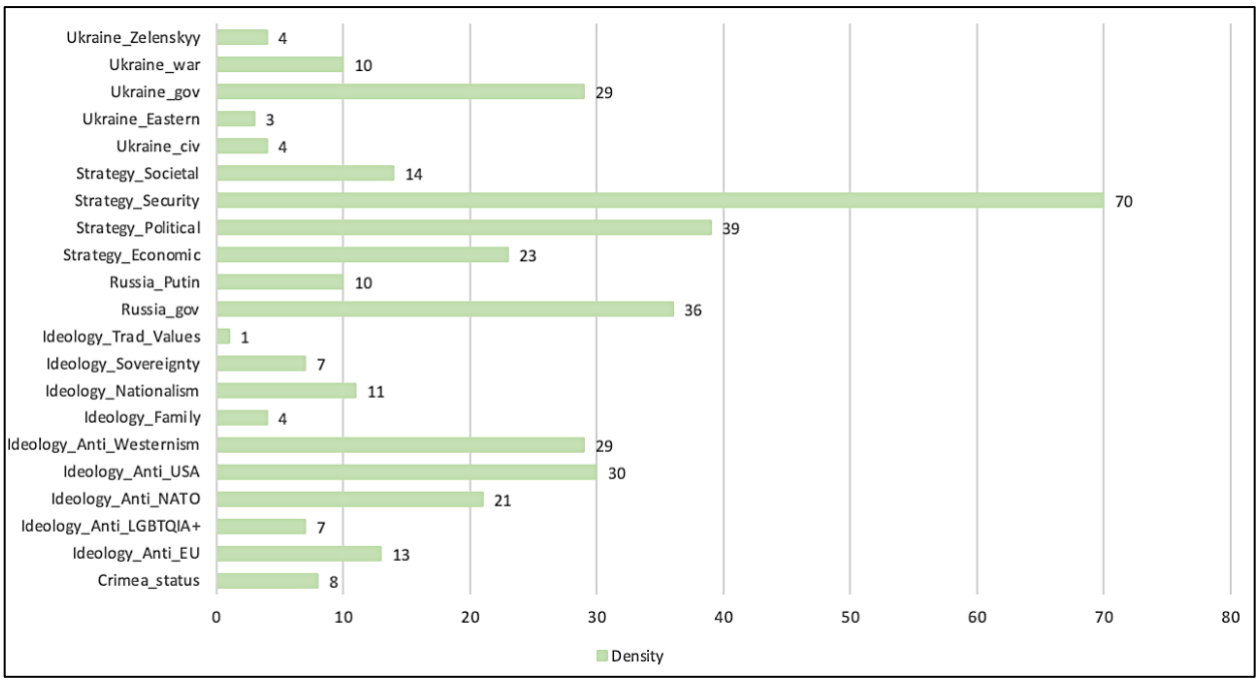
Besides reliability, the notion of validity is also essential in any academic research since it indicates that the researcher is measuring what is intended to measure, focusing on how data is gathered and if the means of measurement are accurate (Babbie, 2010, 153; Golofshani, 2003). During the operationalisation of the chosen theoretical concepts (Esaiasson et al. 2017, 58), the variety of information sources (debates, party manifestos, speeches) ensured that the research was well-developed and comprehensive. After that, this triangulation of the material selected for this thesis, including the codes and methodology, is adequate and enables this thesis the validity it needs. The mentioned measures aim to ensure the highest level of validity and reliability of this research.

4. Analysis

As already described, this chapter looks at the similarities and differences in the political positioning of the AfD and Die Linke toward Russia. This analysis is a prepared overview in which

all positions within the respective dimensions are presented. First of all, based on the selected coding scheme, the ideological positioning based on the four crosspoints to the Russian government: anti-Westernism, anti-EU, conservatism, and nationalism are checked in order to ensure a correct assessment of the ideological affiliation of the AfD and Die Linke and thus also to be able to draw initial comparisons such as in the use of an anti-EU narrative. At the same time, the first hypothesis, which states that German anti-establishment parties have a pro-Russian position due to a profound ideological affinity with the Russian government under Putin, is tested. The density of the 21 codes within the 30 documents analyzed is shown in Table 5. In total, 304 text passages were marked. The code which occurred most frequently was Strategy_Security. Next to the code concerning traditional values, key topics such as Eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian civilization and the current Ukrainian President Zelenskyy were addressed less frequently, hence the related codes were only used rarely, as visible in table 5. The importance of these results for this thesis will be further elaborated in the following sections.

Table 5: Density of all used codes



4.1 Ideological Affiliation

As mentioned above, the ideological component has already been divided into four different, albeit similar, directions. When analysing these ideological aspects, it can be seen that the most frequent ideological parallels to the Russian government can be found on the part of the AfD. Thus, this serves to strengthen the explanatory basis for the use of a pro-Russian position. On the part of Die Linke, the ideological conviction is unsuitable for using pro-Russian sentiments as an anti-establishment party. In the following, each of the four chosen ideological directions will be examined in more detail. Finally, the result of the test of the first hypothesis will be as presented by briefly including all four ideological spheres.

Anti-Westernism

In terms of Anti-Westernism, there is predominantly a negative attitude towards the U.S. and NATO formulated by both parties. Although, the AfD is convinced that cooperation with the U.S. is an "anchor" (AfD, 2014,11) for Germany and NATO. However, as Byston (AfD) emphasised they see an imbalance in how the U.S. represents its interests compared to Germany's national interests (AfD, 2021). This predominance of U.S. interests over Germany's ultimately leads to the consequence that contacts with other countries, such as Russia, are deliberately interrupted. Thus, the following statement made by AfD politician Keuter summarises the position against the U.S. by claiming that the U.S. is manipulating European states to prevent a possible approximation to Russia: "Who benefits from this escalation on the border in Ukraine, cui bono? The USA is using the Nord Stream 2 pipeline as leverage. Germany is supposed to sacrifice its interests for foreign interests. We look at the EU sanctions of 2014, which, by the way, quite cleverly exclude the USA." (Stefan Keuter, 27.01.22). This view is also held by Die Linke who according to Wagenknecht (2015) assumes that the main interest of the U.S. is to prevent an alliance between Germany and Russia because this cooperation is the only power that can threaten the U.S. Thus, a narrative of a limited Russia is used, in which Germany cannot realize the chance of an alliance with Russia due to the influence of the U.S. on German politics and the international alliance structures in general. In this case, political strategies, as well as the turning away from known cooperation structures with the U.S. and new, though not clearly identified, possibilities on different levels, are used to underline the blindness of Germany in the chance to cooperate with

Russia. As an avowedly anti-arms-export party, Die Linke increases its antipathy against the U.S. by referring to NATO as "only an instrument of U.S. hegemonic aspirations" (Wagenknecht, 19.03.2015) which is "a relic of the cold war" acting in the same schemes for decades (Die Linke, 2021). By referring to the continuing cold war, which has not been overcome by NATO and the U.S., the West is identified as the culprit for the strained relationship with Russia. Furthermore, the cold war implies security policy difficulties that are once again emphasized by the leftists in order to name the danger for Germany not only in the above-mentioned political sphere but also in its own security, which, according to Die Linke, is not protected but increasingly damaged by NATO. The reference to Russia is also chosen for strategic security reasons. Thereby, Die Linke often refers to Germany's historical obligations, which are particularly evident in the election manifesto from the previous year. "We need a policy of détente with Russia instead of further escalation and troop deployments or manoeuvres on its Western border. This is one of the great lessons and obligations from the Second World War." (Die Linke, 2021, 137).

With regard to the eastward expansion of NATO toward Russia, both parties imply an understanding of Russia's security interests. In fact, the West has "arrogantly disregarded Russian security interests for decades" (Schmidt, 17.02.2022), although "Putin has made offers" (Byston, 27.01.2022). Thus, in conclusion, the following commonalities can be made in the area of anti-Westernism of both parties: The influence of the U.S., also in connection with NATO, in Germany is as a serious reason to limit or prevent cooperation with Russia. Most striking is that while the AfD in its manifesto from 2014 insists on maintaining a two-way relationship, it has changed its narrative over the years to an increasingly hostile U.S. and NATO narrative. Even though it does not take as radical steps as those mentioned by Die Linke, such as dissolving NATO and any military treaties with the U.S., the AfD has a strong sense of antipathy toward the West. Particularly relevant here is the use of political and security policy strategies of the parties: the connection to the U.S. is used as an emerging key foreign policy issue to stoke fears of a reviving cold war. Thus, in the context of the Ukraine crisis, the satisfaction of independent German security policy needs against the will of the U.S. through a rapprochement with Russia is relevant.

Anti-EU Attitudes

Concerning Anti-EU sentiments, against all expectations, Die Linke also emphasises an increased negative position toward the EU. Although die Linke rejects a common European army (Die Linke, 2014, Wagenknecht, 19.03.2015), common ground exists in the assumption that the EU is in crisis (AfD, 2014; Die Linke, 2014, 2017). Like Russia, the AfD and Die Linke also speak of an undemocratic EU that prohibits national sovereignty. "Instead of peace and social justice for the people of Europe, freedom of the markets was and still is the top priority" (Die Linke, 2014, 61). This minimisation of the relevance of the EU shows the proximity to a pro-Russian position by both parties. Undermining the importance of the EU's existence, furthermore, demonstrates that other partnerships would benefit Germany more significantly than focusing exclusively on the EU's needs. It is particularly interesting that while there is antipathy to the EU from both parties, Die Linke sees a reform rather than the complete dissolution of relevant economic structures such as the euro area as a more suitable tool.

Regarding the Ukraine crisis, the AfD politician Hampel promotes its pro-Russian sentiments by stating that "the Ukrainian conflict - we must always remember this - did not arise; it was brought about. A wrong German foreign policy brought it about, and it was brought about by a wrong European foreign policy. The Ukraine conflict was triggered by an aggressive expansionist policy of the European Union." (Hampel, 12.12.2019). This already implies that on the part of the AfD, the EU, as well as the German government, is partly to blame for the tragedy of the conflict in Ukraine. The Russian government also uses a similar narrative to underline its involvement in this crisis, in particular through the introduction of the Normandie format. In summary, both parties see the EU as a drifting model with no raison d'être for the future. Thus, their assessment of the situation in Ukraine resembles the one of the Russian government. Nevertheless, there are differences in the radicality of the EU's classification. While the AfD promotes the complete dissolution of relevant economic structures such as the euro area (AfD, 2014, 5), Die Linke sees reform as a suitable tool for reviving the initial founding idea of the EU, which is "European unification" (Wagenknecht, 19.03.2015). In conclusion, it can be stated that similar to Russia's attitude toward the EU, both anti-establishment parties emphasise a negative sentiment regarding the EU, which is a further step toward increasing its sympathy toward pro-Russian sentiments.

Conservatism

The parties have apparent differences, focusing on conservative ideological structures, including traditional family construction and anti-LGBTQIA+ movements: “Family is where people, regardless of sexual orientation, are there for each other.” (Die Linke, 2013, 41). As expected, this loose definition is not shared by the AfD. Following them, the image of the family consisting of a father, mother and children is the crucial orientation (AfD, 2017), is the “nucleus of our society” (AfD, 2013, 3; 2021, 104) and thus has to be secured as such by the law. In addition to this variation in defining family, both anti-establishment parties differ in how they interact with the LGBTQIA+ community. Since Die Linke has already included minorities in the identification of family, the fundamental support of this community is also valid. Thus, among other things, the party supports trans* people in their struggle for the right to self-determine gender identity (Die Linke, 2019, 26) as well as the view that “all forms of violence and glorification of violence against women, children and LGBTQIA+ must be consistently punished” (Die Linke, 2021, 105). The AfD has a contrary view on this, which can additionally justify its closeness to the Russian government on these issues. Characteristics are, for instance, the rejection of the elimination of the traditional image of the family through appropriate teaching, the denial of gender-neutral language, or the rejection of any promotion of “Equal Pay Day” (AfD, 2017).

Moreover, the AfD calls for teaching and research based on gender ideology to be cancelled as “the professional qualifications of an applicant alone must be decisive” (AfD, 2021, 154). This coding thus confirms that the AfD has a stronger position in conservatism than Die Linke. Therefore, the ideological affinity to Russia, which also concentrates its politics on increased traditional and conservative structures, is justified once again and serves as a further ideological diversion for the proximity to and use of pro-Russian sentiments. For Die Linke, no ideological affinity with Russia can be established due to its tolerant approach to sexual minorities, which leads to a loose definition of family. Thus, this ideological composition not only shows a difference to the AfD but also to Russia, which cannot be used as an explanation for its pro-Russian position.

Nationalism

The last ideological criterion of this paper focuses on nationalistic incentives, particularly the question of sovereignty. Similarities can be found in the assumption that the sovereign right of citizens in partner countries to shape their future without outside interference must be secured (Die Linke, 2019). However, the AfD goes further by claiming that "legislative powers shifted back to national parliaments" (AfD, 2013, 2). In particular, Germany's weight in the European institutions should be secured and increased in accordance with its population and economic importance (AfD, 2014, Chrupalla, 27.02.2022). In these statements, a comparison can be drawn with the Russian government. Similar to Putin's Russia, the AfD wants to strengthen Germany's position on the international stage. There are parallels to how their own country is being conceived. economic, as well as social superiority should lead to being able to act on the same level as other "great powers". Concrete possibilities of realization also resemble the Russian government. For example, the entry of undesirable people should be restricted or banned with the help of border controls (AfD, 2017). Although no direct reference is made to Russia's border controls, the ideological approach of national sovereignty, which must come first according to the AfD, is particularly important in supporting the party's pro-Russian narrative. Although such radical thought-provoking impulses are not to be found on the left wing, Gysi's statement illustrates Germany's conception on the international level. "Since the Two-plus-Four Treaty, Germany's occupation status has ultimately ended. Germany is a sovereign country; it is up to us and no one else to decide which intelligence services we cooperate with and how." (Gregor Gysi, 21.05.2015). It can therefore be stated that nationalist structures were identified more frequently in the AfD during the coding process. However, contrary to expectations, Die Linke is also convinced that Germany should gain importance and thus sovereignty in order to end its dependence on the aforementioned NATO and the U.S.. Moreover, Gysi's statement also shows that such a process can only be realised through partnerships with other countries like Russia. Furthermore, he proclaims that such cooperation would only strengthen Germany while also increasing the understanding of Russia's needs. As a result, he emphasises a clear solution without mentioning possible obstacles during a phase of rapprochement between the two countries.

4.1.1 Result of H1: Ideological Affiliation

Based on the results presented above, it can be concluded that the inclusion of an ideological affiliation as a basis for explaining sympathy towards Russia varies in strength. Both parties present a clear picture, with blame on the one hand and deliberate omissions on the other. One of the latter is that there is rarely a Russian actor: If the Russians are somehow involved, they are primarily formulated in the passive voice. The other actors, most of them with negative connotations, are the German government, the EU, NATO, the "West" as perpetrators, the Ukrainian government of Poroshenko (Ukrainian president 2014-2019) and, at its core, the Ukrainian "fascists" as accomplices.

Overall, the AfD has achieved the most ideological agreement with Putin's Russia. There are similarities to the interrogation of these actors in questions of an anti-positioning towards the U.S., NATO, and the EU. The goal-oriented conviction is to present the relevance of other actors and the opportunities for cooperation for Germany. The AfD propagates a "weakened and backward" West narrative like Russia's views. Under the assumption of a rapprochement in Russia, a common position of superiority over the Western world emerges, leading to a fundamental change in power. Like the AfD, Die Linke also blames Berlin for this exclusion from a partnership with Russia, following an ideology of blindness established by the U.S. to divide Europe. This seeming willingness for closer ties to Russia results from a protracted sequence of subjective concerns about Germany's geopolitical 'Self.' Party desires reinforce this ideological conception for a stronger national voice and conservative structures within the society following the Russian example. Ultimately, the AfD's revision of the nation-identity is possibly the clearest example of an anti-establishment party striving to combine ideological reasoning with Germany's image difficulties due to the historical background. Indeed, this detailed account of the crisis-driven present facing Germany and its subsequent impact on its traditional Russian ally is essential to promote the notion that these issues are supposed to originate from organisations such as the EU. However, the AfD's criticism of Brussels appears to be tempered in the light of Germany's particular history and leadership position in the organisation. For example, while the EU's past existence as an economic-driven organisation based on shared interests and consisting of sovereignty, but loosely connected nation-states, is considered compatible with other states, the organisation's recent "centralism" (AfD, 2014) has ultimately provoked problematic sentiments.

Despite the claimed "lies" of European ministers, whose acts are considered a violation of non-interference (Die Linke, 2014, 2017) with a sovereign state that has naturally opted to put the nation at the centre of decision-making. Thus, for both anti-establishment parties, the idea of Moscow's evolution into a state pursuing Russian interest politics is seen as a successful revolt against the contemporary world, with these decisions playing an essential role in understanding Moscow's position in the international arena. As a result, parties' narratives about Russian involvement in the Ukraine crisis show much admiration for the Kremlin's actions. Rhetoric based on historical facts stating that Crimea never belonged to Ukraine argues that the AfD and Die Linke also believe in Russia's unprecedented conservative power, which is considered an inherent fact comparable to Eurasianism (Robinson, 2010). As a result, both parties are deeply categorised in the German *Putin-Versteher*.

Certainly, Die Linke has similar positions to Russian ideological convictions; however, they do not reach an agreement with Putin's Russia in all of the four ideological directions chosen for this thesis. Besides antipathy toward the U.S, NATO and the EU, conservative and national structures exist, although not openly formulated as is the case for the AfD. Analysing the parliamentary speeches between 2014 and now, the perceptions and agitation patterns become apparent. An example of this is the formulated desire to defuse the conflict in Ukraine through economic development, driven by the conviction that the competition is being fueled by fascistic and can be resolved within Ukraine through increased social benefits (Gysi, 2014; Dehm, 2014). Essential to identify is ideological "double standards" in the perception of the conflict. What superficially appears as concern for the rights of conscientious objectors is nothing more than "Anti-Imperialism" and the prolongation of the classical communist idea of "just" and "unjust" wars. Thereby, Russian militarism, including the well-known socially problematic aspects of military service there, is not mentioned. These mention Die Linke's explanatory patterns and narratives concerning developments in Ukraine and sympathy with Russia. Similar to the AfD, it includes the apologetic legend that Russia is reacting to an encirclement by the West, that NATO assured Russia in 1990 that it would not expand eastward, or that by attacking the rest of Yugoslavia in 1999, the West undertook an action that was just as questionable under international law as the annexation of Crimea. This narrative thus works with an emotionally highly effective

production of the enemy image, enabling it to ignore Russian military actions in Ukraine completely.

Thus, it can be concluded that in both cases, an ideological conviction outlines a similarity to the Russian governmental ideology which consequently helps explain their pro-Russian position. However, the analysis shows that a difference in the intensity of ideological affiliation toward Russia is visible. While the AfD has mainly a consent connection to Russia's political ideology, Die Linke seems to be a certain rule breaker. Due to its tolerant positioning on conservative issues such as family construction and the rights of minorities, the ideological connection to Russia has disappeared, which is why it can be assumed that the left-wing only uses isolated ideological strands that are lucrative for it to formulate a pro-Russian positioning. Thus, it can finally be said that the first hypothesis only applies to the AfD. For Die Linke, the first hypothesis can only be partially verified.

4.2 Strategic Positioning

After establishing commonalities and differences between the AfD and Die Linke, which are explained through an ideological lens this second part aims to test the second hypothesis, which assumes that German anti-establishment parties with a pro-Russian position use it to strategically differentiate themselves from other parties and thus attract new voters. However, as the first hypothesis was only partially verified, it must be assumed that another factor is relevant to explain the favourable position of both anti-establishment parties under review. Since, based on the chosen theoretical framework, parties compete with each other not only in elections. Riker's concept of 'heresthetics' explains that parties address certain provocative situations themselves in order to be what Hobolt and de Vries (2015) call the 'issue entrepreneur'. For this paper, one example is the German government's unwillingness to cooperate with Russia, which has economic and political consequences. In this case, the AfD and Die Linke choose purposely to address this as a societal issue while offering solutions for it. Due to its profound pro-Russian position, both see a competitive advantage because they assume to be identified as better capable of dealing with Russia as an issue than the other German parties. In particular, during a crisis such as the Ukraine crisis, parties benefit from connecting themselves to voters that see the potential in the Russo-German relationship, which should be strengthened. As mentioned above, the analysis was done

by differentiating the type of strategy in security, economic, societal, and political and by selecting five critical events in the context of the Ukraine conflict, after which the following results are presented (see appendix 6a-6e).

The Start of a Long-Lasting Crisis: War in Eastern Ukraine of 2014

In the context of the military confrontations in Eastern Ukraine, which began in March 2014, the parties concentrated their strategy on various components. Thus, the AfD rarely addresses economic or social consequences when referencing the war in Eastern Ukraine. Statements such as “It would be irresponsible to send weapons to this region. The CDU and CSU’s political approach contradicts our country's national and economic interests. Good relations with Russia are indispensable for peace and prosperity on our continent.” (Schmidt, 17.02.2022) are used to underline the security component which is based on the results the critical instrument utilized by the AfD to emphasize their strategy. Although a complete separation of the strategy types is difficult due to their interconnectedness, it is clear that political aspects are also mentioned in the context of this event in order to underline the pro-Russian positioning but also to distinguish themselves from other parties. Therefore, the approach mentioned by AfD politician Schmidt is strengthened by Bystron’s agreement that “Russia has the resources, we have the know-how. It is in the interest of the European Union, of all the states in the EU, to cooperate with Russia, just as it is in Russia’s interest.” (27.01.2022). This turning away from economic and social strategies to politically named issues (even if only rarely) sets them apart from Die Linke. However, by including social aspects in this war scenario, the party enables itself to strengthen its ties to the national as well as international society. Thus, for instance, the left-wing politician Dehm refers to the fact of a fascist group maintaining itself after the start of the war in Ukraine with the help of German funds. Through his statement “In April [2014], an exhibition entitled "Beware of Russians" was opened in the Kyiv Center for Contemporary Art by so-called Maidan artists […]. There, Russian people are shown in animal cages with a sign "Please do not feed".” (25.06.2014), Die Linke highlights the difficulty of correctly identifying friends and enemies in such a complex war situation. The critical assessment is that the German government is deliberately turning away from the option of trying to understand the Russian side or is being deliberately turned away from the West. Although the AfD follows this narrative, it cannot speak of a fascist-ruled Ukraine because of its ideological convictions. Therefore, the identification of the Ukrainian government

remains in the passive realm, using the term Ukraine as the overriding designation. Finally, the time frame in which the statements were made is relevant. Immediately after the beginning of the military actions, Die Linke had already established a position in which the Ukrainian government of the time was seen as the enemy. It condemns the act of a sanctions policy without first having communicated diplomatic goals with Russia. The extent to which a change in the strategic positioning towards Russia is carried out during further military conflicts will be highlighted in the further course of the analysis. In the case of the AfD, the statements back to before the war in Ukraine), and even though concerns have been mentioned about the Russian military presence at the eastern Ukrainian border, the party follows the realm of security issues that have been not addressed enough by the German government although the solution seems to be so close and easy: cooperation with Russia for complete security (Schmidt, 17.02.2022; Bystron, 27.01.2022).

Secession or Annexation? – Status of Crimea (2014)

After March 2014, the peninsula Crimea was considered by mainly German anti-establishment parties as part of the Russian territory. However, only for Die Linke and the AfD did this development reach such a high level of concern, which made it possible to emphasize the importance of this event for establishing communication channels with Russia. According to the AfD (2022), Crimea is historically seen as part of Russia, and it is nonsense that it will become a part of Ukraine again (Keuter, 2022). “It is the reality that counts, not our wish for reality to be different.” (Moosdorf, 2022). Thus, the party points out that the status of Crimea is tied to the Russian territory and a national acceptance on the part of the German government would lead to a further de-escalation of the relationship with Russia. Similarly, Die Linke says, according to Gysi (2014), that the people of Crimea wanted this referendum. Particularly relevant here is the use of the term *secession* by Die Linke (Höger, 2014). Thus, Die Linke does not describe a violent Russian takeover of Crimea because, as already mentioned by Gysi, the population is asking for secession after the example of the Catalans in Spain. It is striking that different European referenda are equated despite their different contexts in order to emphasize the term secession as a legitimate application. Paradoxically, however, in the same speech “the secession of Crimea is classified as illegal under international law” (Gysi, 2014), which indicates a strategic orientation of double standards including several consequences. On the one hand, it leads to intra-party differences in

the overall party positioning on the status of Crimea, and on the other hand, the exact position on Crimea emphasized by Die Linke cannot be concretely grasped by the voter.

However, both parties agree on the reason for the territorial separation of Crimea. It was primarily the West's fault. "We have to take Russia's security interests seriously, then world peace will also work out." (Keuter, 2022). And since "Russia's security interests are under threat" (Gysi, 2014), it is up to the West to address these concerns and, if necessary, take action to ease the situation. Particularly, according to Gysi (2014) the NATO's Eastern expansion is the reason for the situation in Crimea. This underlines the mainly use of political related consequences for Germany as well as Europe as strategy for promoting the partly understanding for Russia's interactions with Crimea. Finally, it has to be noted that there is ambiguity in the left's assessment of Crimea's status. On the one hand, there is talk of secession and the will of the people, and understanding for the Russian government is implied, while on the other hand, there is talk of decisions by Russia that are contrary to the will of the people (Gysi, 2014; Höcke, 2014). Thus, the use of double standards by Die Linke can already be seen in 2014, which is based in particular on the relevance of strategic orientation. For the AfD, this event has a different form of relevance, which rests in an ideological conviction. The use of security-motivated strategies leads to several scenarios of outcomes in the Ukraine crisis. "There is no war, there is no threat of war. There is no threat of a gas shortage." (Keuter, 2022). In January 2022, the approach was to accept the Russian annexation which will lead to the fact that the West secures peace at the international. However, in March 2022, a shift in the pro-Russian position is seen, emphasizing that "We call on Russia to immediately stop the bloodshed and come back to reason, meaning to the negotiating table!" (Moosdorf, 2022). However, unlike the ambiguity of Die Linke, the condemnation of Russia is followed by a condemnation of the West. For the AfD, the war in Ukraine is now the preliminary culmination of a long series of conflicts, in which several of them were started by the West, probably with good intentions, however, failing regarding the results. Thus, despite current events, a closeness to Russia can be observed. It is noticeable that such statements are unclear to potential AfD voters. A scapegoat is clearly defined, but complicity in the situation and possible solutions are presented in such an unspecific manner that no clear picture of the position of Russia can be determined. Lastly, in both cases, a shift in the pro-Russian position can be observed, which, however, differs in its strength.

Solution or Obstacle? – Minsk II (2015)

The third event of this analysis focuses on the Minsk Agreements which is a set of international agreements aimed at putting an end to the conflict in Ukraine's Donbas area. Following the failure of the first agreement (Minsk Protocol) to cease the conflict, a new and updated agreement, Minsk II, was signed on February 12, 2015. Within this event, the AfD first denunciated Germany's role in IR since "Macron has taken the reins of action in the Ukraine conflict, not Berlin." (Hampel, 2019). Thus, by identifying France as the leading power in the Normandy Format through the choice of rapprochement with Russia using diplomatic tools, France is openly accepting Russia's concerns (Hampel, 2019). Through the use of mainly political-motivated advantages for the German government, the AfD aims to legitimize its pro-Russian position. Moreover, a gradual lifting of sanctions against Russia should rephrase the concerns of both sides, the Ukrainian and Russian ones (Hampel, 2019; Friesen, 2019). Despite the fact that also Die Linke assumes that "Minsk II led to a significant reduction in the number of deaths in the region over the past few weeks fewer people have died in the region than in the weeks and months before and that the door has been opened to a peaceful solution" (Wagenknecht, 2015), a security-driven strategy is used to highlight the relevance of further cooperation with Russia, although lacking clear examples of how to realize this vision. Besides, the insurance of security and economic advantages are broadly emphasized which can only be achieved by lifting the sanctions against Russia (Wagenknecht, 2015). Even though, Minsk II is only the beginning of de-escalation, it is, however, also at Germany's discretion to actively shape it. According to Gysi (2015), a peace policy in the Ukraine crisis can only be achieved under the following change. "[The] NATO should stop flexing its military muscles in Poland and the Baltic states. If NATO stops its provocations, then we will be in a much better position to demand that Russia also stop its manoeuvres, which I find adventurous." Thus, a concession policy in form of a tête-à-tête movement is promoted in which the fear is coming from both sides, the U.S. and Russia. In this quote, ambiguity is visible. Although this reinforces the concern about the arms buildup, it can be inferred from the sentence that Russia is also to be criticized, which makes the strength of Die Linke's pro-Russian position crumble. All in all, while the AfD mainly focuses on political strategy by emphasizing its positive perspective on Russia, Die Linke mostly makes use of economic and security strategies to illustrate its pro-Russian position in the case of Minsk II.

Sanctions policy against Russia (2014)

As this event concentrates on measurements of limitations for Russia's military interactions within Ukraine, it could be assumed that such a tool will be accepted and promoted by the majority of German politicians. However, economic and political disadvantages for the imposing nation are no uncommon side effects. Especially for politicians of the AfD and Die Linke, these side effects are particularly relevant to justify their pro-Russian position. Thus, scenarios in which Germany will suffer enormously economically by imposing sanctions against Russia are used primarily by the AfD to openly rely on security threats as well as economic disasters to call for the end of sanctions (Gauland, 2021; Hampel, 2018). Further, the AfD claims a certain acceptance of the otherness of Russia's value system regarding economic cooperation: "It is wrong to give up a natural gas pipeline that is useful for us as well as for Russia just because we do not like the value base on which Russia is governed." (Gauland, 2021). Thus, the economic component is mainly used to highlight the importance of cooperation by ensuring national economic interests such as the delivery of Russian gas. Similar to the AfD, Die Linke does not identify sanctions policy as a successful tool in IR: "Sanctions are not a policy, but a substitute for it. But the U.S. is pushing for sanctions because Russia's response to them would not hit the U.S., but Europeans, and especially Germans." (Gysi, 2014). The anti-western positioning can be particularly used in this context. According to Die Linke, it is a steering of the Americans towards Europe to impose sanctions against Russia. Political strategies are used since according to the definition, Germany's political position is under attack. "One day Germany must take back sanctions which will be politically embarrassing. This is going to be rather embarrassing." (Gysi, 2014). Germany's weakened position at the international level is a key element to stimulate change in terms of the Russian-German relationship with the aim of thereby minimizing the relevance of the relationship with the U.S. However, apart from ending the sanctions, there is no concrete target for the problem, but the initiation of negotiations with the Russian government should be initiated due to Russia's military capabilities and the fear of escalation. Interestingly is that in 2022, the tone over Russia is already negative. Thus, Russia is regarded as an "aggressor" (Gysi, 2022), which already shows a clear condemnation of the Russian government. It seems to be more important for the party to maintain its negative stance on weapons and military conflict, and less to admire its positive stance on closer relations with Russia. Consequently, a shift in terms of positioning is classified, which leads to the

result identifying a strategic preference of Die Linke in the positive position on Russia and thus less ideological goals are pursued behind the position. Within this event, no such development has been observed for the AfD.

Unbelievable experience: War in Ukraine (2022)

The 24th February 2022 changed not only the developments in the Ukraine crisis. Military interactions on such a scale in Europe were previously unimaginable. Led by the different changes within the crisis, it was of utmost importance for parties to position themselves clearly in order to provide voters with an assessment of the internal party's view of the developments. Certainly, this process is easier to realizable for mainstream parties than for anti-establishment parties. However, also the SPD still has difficulties in choosing a clear line of position when it comes to Russia. In the context of the war, a shift in the AfD's narrative of Russia can be identified. As for all the other German parties, a condemnation of Russia for the war of aggression is openly communicated. At the same time, however, ideas for changing the situation are suggested: "Possible solutions require concessions on both sides. Mr Scholz, in your speech today you, unfortunately, reactivated the Cold War; I have to say that so clearly." (Chrupalla, 2022). This way of assigning blame is a familiar AfD scheme. The fear of a further escalation is to be stoked to humiliate the German government and its discretion. Moreover, they remain loyal to Putin's strengths by proclaiming that **"**Putin will never lose" (Lucassen, 2022). Furthermore, the decision of delivering weapons to Ukraine is intended to create a false image for future generations. In this case, too, the fear of consequences for the population due to the implied anti-Russia position on the part of the German government is being stoked. As a consequence, a further goal is emphasized by using the strategy of security-motivated statements after the principle "power also means possessing military capabilities" (Lucassen, 2022). Thus, according to the Russian role model, the developments are used as a legitimate justification to promote a rise in Germany's military capacities (Lucassen, 2022). In this case, there is a certain ambiguity on the part of the AfD. On the one hand, it is emphasized that the war is primarily led by Russia's aggression, which shows a united German position. And on the other hand, simultaneously, it is mentioned that the German government, through its erroneous behaviour, is giving signs that can be interpreted in different ways. In addition, there is a kind of fear-making in which attention is drawn to the military deficit in order to initiate an improvement, whereby the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine appears to be less relevant.

However, a strong ambiguity cannot be examined as it has already been classified in the case of Die Linke. The AfD remains committed to its nationalist positions and, despite current developments, promotes a position that nevertheless sees a potential for a Russian-German relationship. As for Die Linke, a stronger shift toward a negative Russian narrative is visible: "Russia is waging a war of aggression against Ukraine in violation of international law. […] We are also in solidarity with the courageous people who are currently defying Putin in Russia and demonstrating for peace." (Mohammed Ali, 2022). This anti-Putin position emphasises a mainly negative position against the Russian government, which is clearly admitted. "We assess the situation differently today and say clearly: Putin is the aggressor here and must be stopped immediately." (Mohammed Ali, 2022). Such clear formulations identify Russia as an enemy, thus discarding the whole positive position towards Russia. For Die Linke it is relevant "to say in all clarity, because there were already so funny interjections in the last debate: If we as the left had any influence on Putin, this war would not have happened. There are no top politicians from my party who have met with Putin." (Lötsch, 2022). Possible links to the Russian government are to be denied. Much more important is to initiate peace negotiations, as Die Linke follows an anti-war ideological approach the increase of weapons and arms race have not to be permitted (Lötsch, 2022). "United in the side of Ukraine, and Ukrainian people whose protection should be ensured in Germany." (Mohammed Ali, 2022). The emphasis of the Die Linke is intended to place the relevance of humanitarian assistance above that of military support for Ukraine. Thus, it can be stated that similar to the AfD, a security-driven strategy was applied to outline their position. Additionally, Die Linke includes political-driven strategies such as humanitarian help for Ukrainian refugees, which would increase the German reputation at the IR level. The combination of both strategies aims to explain its logical shift toward a mainly negative view of Russia. Nevertheless, a clear strategic direction can thus be found, since there are admissions to the wrong assessment of Russia in the Ukraine crisis, these have as different an effect on the voter as the promoted position on Ukraine at the beginning of the conflict. Therefore, it seems that Die Linke aims to steer closer to the mainstream and thus move away from the role of issue entrepreneurship in the Russia question, as it does not seem to have an additional winning chance by emphasising this issue. Through this shift and the underlying reasons, a strategic stance by imposing a pro-Russian position can be ascertained.

4.2.1 Result of H2: Strategic Positioning

Following the results mentioned above, it can be concluded that both parties indeed use strategic positioning concerning their pro-Russian position. Thus, in both cases, a shift in the position toward Russia is classified. However, the strength of this change differs enormously. The table below describes briefly the density of the usage of strategic typologies based on the five chosen events during the Ukraine crisis. On the basis of the results, the AfD used mainly security-driven strategies (13 times) when referring to its position toward Russia. After that, economic and political-strategic considerations are used equally often (six times), whereas a connection between a societal strategy and closer ties to Russia is highlighted the least (five times). Regarding Die Linke, politically motivated strategies are most emphasised (14 times). Concerning their favourable position toward Russia, societal (9 times) and security-related (8 times) strategies are almost equally used. Regarding economic strategies, Die Linke makes the least of this type by only mentioning six times certain kinds of concerns. In total, Die Linke used 37 times strategic approaches to legitimize and promote its pro-Russian position. Regarding the AfD, 30 times strategy aimed to promote further voters while highlighting its positive standpoint toward Russia.

Table 6: Results of Strategy Analysis based on the number of references of the respective strategic type

	Status of Crimea (03/2014)		War in Eastern Ukraine (03/2014)		Minsk II (02/2015)		Sanctions against Russia (since 2014)		War in Ukraine (02/2022)		
	AfD	*Die Linke*	*AfD*	*Die Linke*	*AfD*	*Die Linke*	*AfD*	*Die Linke*	*AfD*	*Die Linke*	***Total***
Economic strategy	*2*	*1*	*X*	*1*	*X*	*3*	*3*	*X*	*1*	*1*	***6 / 6***
Societal strategy	*X*	*X*	*X*	*3*	*X*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*4*	*4*	***5 / 9***
Security strategy	*6*	*X*	*2*	*1*	*X*	*3*	*2*	*X*	*3*	*4*	***13 / 8***

Political strategy	*2*	*4*	*1*	*X*	*3*	*X*	*X*	*7*	*X*	*3*	*6 / 14*
Total	**10**	**5**	**3**	**5**	**3**	**7**	**6**	**8**	**8**	**12**	*30 / 37*

It is striking that economic strategies are rarely used in both cases. However, the AfD believes in an increase in economic connection to Russia since it "serves the good of all European people" (AfD, 2019). Thus, economic projects such as Nord Stream 2 are advocated as a mutual success in which deeper connections between Germany and Russia are the goal (AfD, 2019, 2021) while receiving low-cost primary energy (AfD, 2021). Consequently, the facilitation or lifting of sanctions against Russia is advocated (AfD, 2017, 2021). The main point of argument is Germany's economic damage, which primarily harms society: "We will achieve little in the way of rethinking, but we will do ourselves a great deal of harm." (Moosdorf, 2022). A different approach is used by Die Linke, who is not only seeing damage in the German society but also harmful to Russian society since "economic sanctions primarily affect the ordinary population and [therefore] must be ended" (Die Linke, 2013). Moreover, Die Linke questions the strategy of imposing sanctions; for them, it implies a lack of strategy in which, besides the society, also Germany companies have to deal with several consequences such as orders that are breaking away (Wagenknecht, 2014). However, sanctioning the Russian elite seems to be a legitimate tool for limiting Russian discretion in Ukraine (Mohamed Ali, 2022). This statement highlights Die Linke's willingness to harm Russia economically by excluding the Russian society, which seems to be theoretically a kind approach. Still, technically, this is impossible since savings in other countries will ensure the financial activity of the elite. The "no sanctions, yes rapprochement" approach is of primary importance in both cases. The argument that this will harm German society is taken up in both cases and used to legitimise the pro-Russian position. In the case of the AfD, this reinforces the idea that Russia is an important economic partner that must be respected because of its gas supplies. This emphasises the ideological vision of a strong Germany independent of the West (in the economic sense). For Die Linke, increasing independence from the West is also essential, but also statements against the Russian government in the form of limiting the Russian elite in their discretionary powers. Thus, an ambiguity in the position towards Russia as a whole can be observed, in which Die Linke only follows a strategy of German unpreparedness in the economy,

while the favourable position vis-à-vis Russia is of secondary importance. Lastly, it is striking that there are no concrete alternatives other than the insistence on implementing Nord Stream 2 (AfD). For the voter, it is thus increasingly difficult to grasp a definite point of view on the economic orientation toward Russia.

Both parties rarely use societal components in form of strategic goals. It seems that in order to promote a favorable position toward Russia, relying on the harm and hopelessness of Russian society (Mohamed Ali, 2022) during the Ukraine crisis as well as humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees is a less successful approach in order to strategically legitimate a positive stance toward Russia. Thus, it can be stated that for the AfD and Die Linke societal aspects are mentioned in the context of the Ukraine crisis. However, the relevance does not exceed any particular measure, which is why a rare shift in position can be seen in this area. The use of security-driven strategies is a different matter. Both parties cite the inclusion of Russia in an overall security structure as the most crucial point for securing world peace. Unlike the German leftist, which wants to minimise the role of the U.S. on the international stage (Die Linke, 2019), the AfD calls for "balanced cooperation with both the U.S. and Russia" (AfD, 2019, 2021). In this context, the AfD also sees potential in the USA to strengthen the national idea through further cooperation in Germany. In the context of Ukraine, slogans such as the following are increasingly being used. “Ukraine needs a solution, a solution that takes into account the interests of Ukraine on the one hand and the security interests of the Russian Federation on the other. We have just heard it, and I agree with you: there will be no peace without Russia.” (Keuter, 2022). By admitting that “their otherness must also be taken into account when evaluating human rights issues and democratic freedoms” (Gauland, 2021). For the AfD, these statements strengthen and illustrate the pro-Russian attitude. Even during the war in 2022, the developments in Ukraine are used to point out that "The German government must now also turn the wheel in the direction of power politics. Power also means having military capabilities. Germany does not have these capabilities" (Lucassen, 2022). However, no mention is made of whether this is about protecting against further military conflicts in the form of the Russian aggressor, which could lead to irritation among the electorate. For the left, the ideological view that rearmament should be avoided by all means is particularly relevant. It is not difficult for the party to emphasise concessions regarding an incorrect assessment of Russia's position (Mohamed Ali,2022). It can be seen that a shift in the party's position on Russia

readily takes place as soon as it is recognised that voters are at an obvious disadvantage by being neutral about the war or even by supporting Russia's actions in Ukraine. Here, it is evident that the position has been for strategic reasons to set other parties apart. In the political sphere, there is a similarity between the parties in the view that Germany should increasingly make itself independent of the West by paying particular attention to its neighbour in the East (AfD, 2014; Die Linke, 2014, Gysi, 2014). Yet here, too, there is an intense ambiguity, especially among the left. On the one hand, it is argued that "if you [Germany] want a united Europe, then stop humiliating other countries and dictating programs to them that deprive their young generation of any perspective." (Wagenknecht, 2015). At the same time, it is mentioned that this does not change "that criticism of Putin and his government is necessary "(Gysi, 2015).

Thus, after analysing the parties' statements in the context of five key events under four different strategic types, it can be verified that German anti-establishment parties with a pro-Russian position use this position to differentiate themselves from other parties thus attract new voters strategically. Comparing both cases made it clear that both lack a clear standpoint in explaining their favourable position toward Russia. There exist some general indications, such as the need for rapprochement with Russia or the complaints about the West. However, no clear examples are used to strengthen the standpoint, which makes the position weaker. At the same time, the AfD stays loyal to its ideological fascination with Russia due to Putin's promoted national and international power. For Die Linke, the position seems to follow a strategic goal, in which support for Russia is only emphasised as long as it will have electoral advantages for them. But also, the AfD's indicate in certain statements a double standard while highlighting the relevance of keeping cooperation with the U.S high. Thus, the second hypothesis can be verified for both cases as both parties used paradoxical statements. However, the change and willingness to emphasise a hostile position toward Russia after the February 2022 highlights less existing concern to justify their positive Russian standpoint. Therefore, strategic use is more evident with the left than with the AfD.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned in the literature review, there has been little interest in how the German anti-establishment parties use their pro-Russian position to hold onto voter support and to what extent

that might influence the nature of the party. This thesis has contributed by trying to examine the motivations behind the actions of this type of party. In doing so, it has been shown that both parties may have different levels of closeness to the Russian government on an ideological basis. Based on this, the study assumes that strategic motivations are an explanatory reason for the widely expressed sympathy toward Russia under the assumption of party competition. Thus, following the findings of the previous chapter, this study appears to have reached several new and sometimes surprising conclusions.

This thesis aimed to answer the research question, *What positions have German anti-establishment parties taken vis-à-vis the Russian government under Vladimir Putin since 2013, and how can the commonalities and differences between these positions be explained?* Furthermore, this question was divided into two hypotheses; H1: German anti-establishment parties have a pro-Russian position due to a profound ideological affinity with the Russian government under Putin and H2: German anti-establishment parties with a pro-Russian position use it to strategically differentiate themselves from other parties and thus attract new voters. Ultimately, the research results partially confirm the first hypothesis while verifying the second hypothesis to a significant level.

Despite the readiness of anti-establishment parties to cooperate with Russia to create an anti-American geopolitical bloc, compared to Die Linke, the AfD follows its ideological affiliation more by seeing Putin's Russia as a semi-authoritarian and conservative model of government that they would most likely like to see in their own country. Moreover, this model corresponds to their preferences and is perceived as a dynamic response to the wickedness of liberalism and tolerance for minorities from which Western democracies suffer. Therefore, they are naturally attracted to Putin's government, which seems clear due to the similar ideological perception in the fields of anti-Westernism and Eurosceptic statements. Besides the ideological connections, as emphasised by the theory of issue entrepreneurship (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015), the AfD clearly used this unique position to promote the security advantages of cooperating with Russia as a partner in order to demolish the EU and reduce NATO as well as US's role in European security concerns. However, this is not a unique strategy, as Die Linke also increasingly refers to the scenario of an improved Russia-German relationship to hint at political and security strategy strands. According to this analysis, Russia is not a threat to both parties but rather an asset to peace and stability in Europe. For the AfD and Die Linke, the backing of Russia, where necessary, is clearly an advantage since

it is thought that this will destabilise EU governments and the EU itself, which the AfD openly mentions, whereas Die Linke aims to reform the construct of the EU by including Russia as a partner.

The existence of a possible alliance between the anti-establishment parties becomes, in particular, visible during the Ukraine crisis since this context allows for an in-depth study in order to figure out whether the positive position toward Russia has been driven by true ideological convictions or mainly by strategic considerations. The AfD has openly and unreservedly supported Russia in its dispute with Ukraine and its diplomatic confrontation with the West. Further, they also supported Russia's annexation of Crimea, even though that annexation was illegal under international law. Although their support was not enough to change the position of any EU country on the Ukraine and Crimea issues, however, it was helpful to show the parties' ability to raise their pro-Russian voices, which makes them unique and more appealing to undecided voters, mainly Russo – Germans which is, taking into account the fact that the party translated its manifestos purposefully in Russian, clearly a strategic step.

Such an opinion is also held by Die Linke, which has shown through its statements and program booklets that it is not afraid to express its closeness to Russia publicly. However, a shift in the party's attitude and internal party opinions can be identified based on the analysis. In the beginning, some left-wing party members spoke of secession, but over time they openly spoke of annexation and thus of the distribution of the referendum to be held in Crimea. This is just one of many signs that, because Die Linke has fewer ideological parallels with Russia, it is increasingly difficult for them to support this pro-Russian positioning. Thus, in the actions of their party and parliamentary group leaders, the antagonistic contradictions between the Putin regime and "leftist" values are so entirely hidden that there is no longer the slightest hint of an authentic leftist worldview in the sense of enlightened thinking. The case of Die Linke clearly has a dialectical perception of reality, which makes it able to suspend its own utopias and goals in favour of tactical and long-term detours. It is not without risk for such a party because it installs falseness outwardly and (self-)deception inwardly as its mode of operation. The constructions of the enemy are now obviously of greater importance. Thus, while there is no enthusiastic endorsement of the homophobic, sexist, anti-democratic, and military elements as *Putin-Versteher* is an ally that has been regained, it is a regained ally in the fight against the hated West. And one or the other is seen as the so-called double standards of Die Linke. To conclude, the current events in the context of

the war in Ukraine show that die Die Linke is not an authentically left-wing party, although it obviously has no problem with its double standards in matters of truth, a change in the nature of the party is visible leading to a less truthful party for voters.

Therefore, the evidence suggests that, as previously assumed it becomes increasingly costly in electoral terms to support Putin after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, thus, both parties are increasingly moving away from a positive position toward Russia. However, due to its historical and ideological background, the AfD is more capable to build a trustworthy position in favour of Russia, whereas Die Linke has to sit between two chairs, meaning that because of their criticism of internal political developments in Russia and the simultaneous importance of cooperation with the country for security and peace, the true intention of Die Linke can and have to increasingly be called into question.

Limitations

Yet, this work has some limitations that should be considered. First, the selection of cases, which is limited to one country and two anti-establishment parties, is dictated by the scope of this work. The same is true for the number of ideological dimensions and strategies followed by the analysis after critical events included in the study. Since this work focuses on pro-Russian positions over a timeframe of nine years, it can also be used to show the evolution of this type of sympathy and intra-party mechanisms that motivate the support for Russia replicating this approach in future research. Since this paper was unable to focus in-depth on intraparty positions, this work, while accepting its limited scope, is intended to provide a starting point for further research on party behaviour in the role of issue entrepreneur during ongoing competition.

Another limitation is related to technical difficulties regarding linguistic disparities concerning the approaches used. Since the ideological affiliation and strategic positioning presented in section 3.5 were developed in English, a translation is necessary to analyse the election manifestos and parliamentary speeches retrieved in German. Though the research can demonstrate sufficient German and English knowledge, this circumstance is not expected to result in any loss of information or uncertainty. This paper does not claim to present a definitive state of knowledge due to its topicality. However, it represents a snapshot of current anti-establishment party behaviour; future changes do not affect the relevance of the findings made at the time the

paper was written. Moreover, possible future changes in the political positioning toward Russia, mainly due to the developments in the war in Ukraine, may confirm why understanding their ideological affiliation in connection to their strategy is highly relevant.

Additionally, within this topic's context, no coding schemes exist that focus on party behaviour under the circumstances of acting as an issue entrepreneur. Thus, to adapt the model to the parties' behaviour during the competition, previous studies and general definitions of the typologies were used as inspiration. However, the codes were designed for this study independently. These codes are therefore not confirmed by other studies, making them the main limitation of this study. Still, they underline the existence of a research gap and the necessity for further studies. A similar limitation occurs when focusing on the selection of the documents. Various sources, years and types of documents were used in the selection of documents to provide a complete and objective picture of the situation as possible. Despite this careful selection, bias is inevitable. Consequently, the scope of this study makes it impossible to include every document related to this phenomenon which makes this part also a sort of limitation of the study.

Suggestions for future research

The results and limitations of this study lead to some thoughts and suggestions for future research. A more representative study of the pro-Russian position of German anti-establishment parties, possibly incorporating a multi-method approach, could provide a more accurate picture of how parties act as issue entrepreneurs in Germany. In particular, this applies to analysing the parties' positions based on speeches because it can be assumed that not only official statements are essential for assessing the parties' stance on a given issue. Hence, studies that built on this result while including an additional theoretical framework would be of great value. Further, it is interesting to examine the regional differences of both cases and how this might influence the parties' ability for coalitions at the regional level. For this, the case study of Die Linke in Thuringia and its coalition partner SPD is a crucial possibility to analyse this unique research topic further.

Nevertheless, this study has contributed to the understanding of AfD's and Die Linke's position toward Russia, leaving room for further research and increasing the comprehension of the underlying motivations for those *Putin-Versteher*. Future developments in the Ukraine crisis have to reveal whether the sympathy will decrease, meaning that the parties will distance themselves

from the self-chosen issue and focus on other problems while making them their key topics to stand out from the majority. By examining these issues, researchers will not only contribute to the developing field of studies on relations between Russia and Western anti-establishment parties but also help inform and shape current Western public affairs and ultimately strengthen liberal democracy and consolidate democratic international institutions.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Brief description of selected German anti-establishment parties

Co-leaders: Alice Weidel, Tino Chrupalla

Founded: 06.02.2013

Ideology: Right-wing populism

Seats in Bundestag (2022): 81 /736

History and Electoral Success:

As a right-wing and Eurosceptic alternative to the centre-right, the AfD was created to oppose Eurozone policies. Under several leaderships, AfD has shifted more to the right and broadened its goals to include hostility to immigration, Islam, and the European Union. The AfD nearly missed the 5 percent electoral threshold to enter the German Bundestag in the 2013 Federal election. After securing representation in 14 of Germany's 16 state legislatures by October 2017, the AfD won 94 seats, becoming the country's third largest party and the largest opposition party. In the Federal election of 2021, the AfD fell to fifth place.

Party leader: Janine Wissler, Martin Schirdewan

Founded: 16.06.2007

Ideology: Left-wing populism

Seats in Bundestag (2022): 39/736

History and Electorate:

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and Labour and Social Justice - The Electoral Alternative merged to become the party. The party is a direct descendent of the Marxist-Leninist ruling party of former East Germany, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, through the PDS. In the 2021 German federal election, the party received 4.9 percent of the vote. The Left has the smallest parliamentary group in the Bundestag, but it is represented in 10 of Germany's sixteen state legislatures, including all five eastern states. As of 2021, the party leads a partnership in Thuringia with the Social Democratic Party and the Greens, led by Minister-President Bodo Ramelow.

Appendix 2: Data Collection

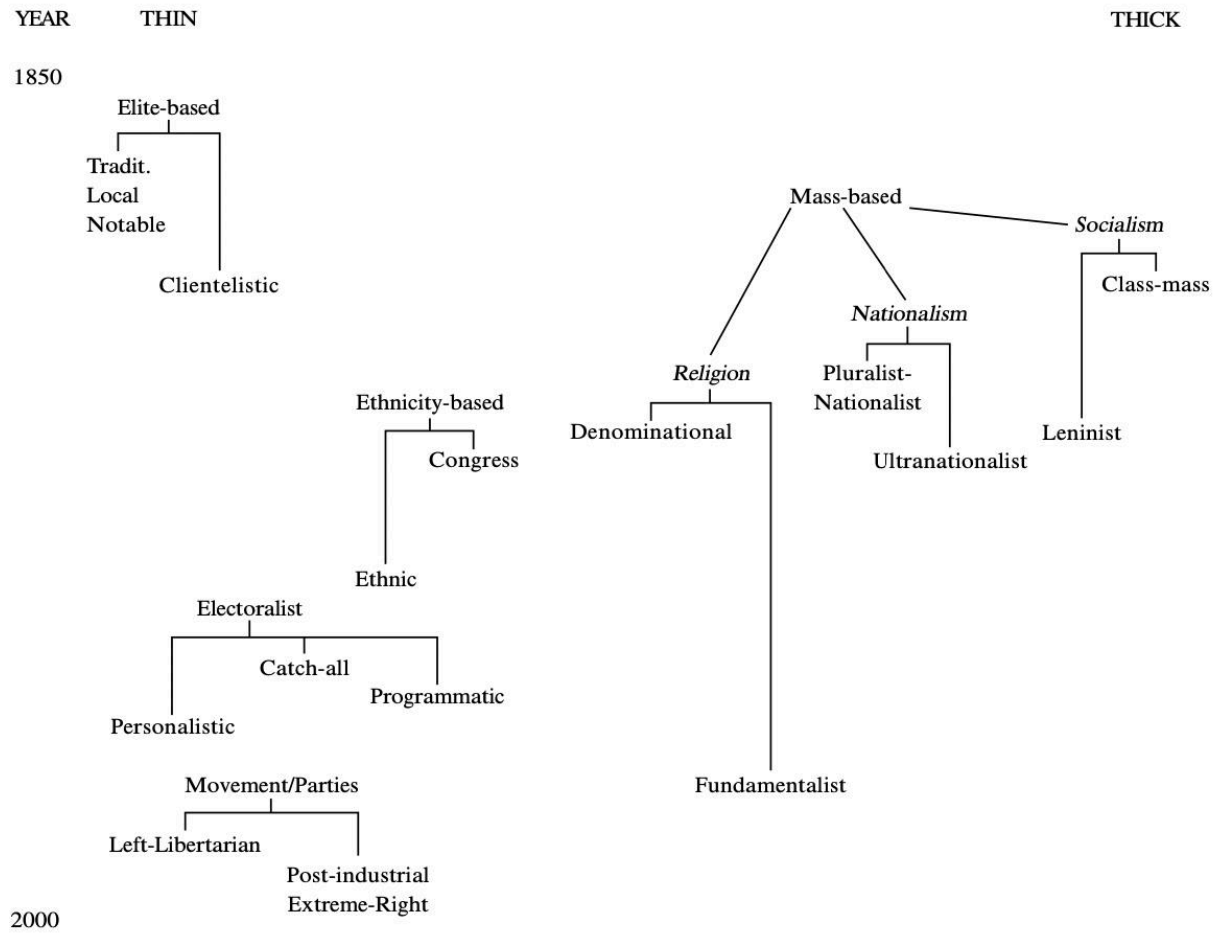
Document Type	Publisher	Number of Documents	Total
Election Manifestos	Alternative für Deutschland	5	
	Die Linke	5	
			10
Parliamentary Speeches	General Federal Government	10	
	Die Linke	10	
			20
			30

Appendix 3: Operationalisation

Theoretical Concepts	Variables	Context related definintion	Measurement	Data Collection
Issue Entrepreneurship in party competition	Pro-Russian position of German anti-establishment parties	A pro-Russian position is defined by an initially supportive stance towards the Russian government.	What positions have German anti-establishment parties taken vis-à-vis the Russian government under Vladimir Putin since 2013? How can the commonalities and differences between these parties be explained?	Election Manifestos: - National manifestos (2013, 2017, 2021) - European manifestos (2014, 2019) Parliamentary Speeches Academic literature
	Ideological Affiliation	Ideological affiliation follows the political spectrum between left-wing and right-wing. As anti-establishment both outer spectra are classified. Ideological orientations contain certain key points. these can be quite diverse, as well as minority freedoms or the fight against minorities.	What were the main ideological aspects dominating a pro-Russian position? To what extent does a profound ideological affinity with the Russian government under Putin explain a positive position toward Russia?	Election Manifestos: - National manifestos (2013, 2017, 2021) - European manifestos (2014, 2019) Parliamentary Speeches
	Strategic Positioning	Strategic positioning follows the definition of consequent advantages, depending on the orientation	To what extent do the parties use a pro-Russian position to strategically differentiate themselves from other parties	Parliamentary Speeches

	of the strategy. Distinctions are drawn in the focus of the strategy. In this case, a distinction is made between economic, societal, security and political strategies.	while also attracting new voters? What kind of strategic types are used? How can key events in a crisis explain the shift of a strategy?

Appendix 4: Political spectrum after Gunther and Diamond (2003)



Appendix 5: Data Matrix of the analyzed documents

Document Number	Titel	Published	Link to document
1	Wahlprogramm Parteitagsbeschluss	14.04.2013	https://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de/sites/default/files/election-program-files/afd_1.pdf
2	Programm für Deutschland	22./23.04.2017	https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/06/2017-06-01_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm_Onlinefassung.pdf
3	Deutschland. Aber normal	11.06.2021	https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2021/06/20210611_AfD_Programm_2021.pdf
4	Mut zu Deutschland. Für ein Europa der Vielfalt.	22.03.2014	https://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de/sites/default/files/election-program-files/afd-europawahl-2014.pdf
5	Europawahlprogramm	15.03.2019	https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2019/03/AfD_Europawahlprogramm_A5-hoch_web_150319.pdf
6	Aktuelle Stunde zu den Ergebnissen des Normandie-Gipfels	12.12.2019	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/19/19134.pdf#P.16732
7	Aktuelle Stunde zu den Ergebnissen des Normandie-Gipfels	12.12.2019	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/19/19134.pdf#P.16732
8	Vereinbarte Debatte Frieden in Europa sichern -Territoriale Integrität der Ukraine	27.01.2022	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20014.pdf#P.885
9	Lage in der Ukraine angesichts des völkerrechtswidrigen Angriffskriegs Russlands und die Auswirkungen auf Deutschland und Europa	16.03.2022	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20020.pdf#P.1435
10	Aktuelle Stunde zu den jüngsten Entwicklungen in Russland	10.02.2021	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/19/19208.pdf#P.26241
11	Sanktionen gegen Russland	01.02.2018	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/19/19208.pdf#P.26241
12	Haltung des Westens zur Politik Russland	17.02.2022	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20017.pdf#P.1126
13	Vereinbarte Debatte Frieden in Europa sichern – Territoriale Integrität der Ukraine	27.01.2022	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20014.pdf#P.891
14	Abgabe einer Regierungserklärung durch den Bundeskanzler zur aktuellen Lage	27.02.2022	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20019.pdf#P.1369

15	Abgabe einer Regierungserklärung durch den Bundeskanzler zur aktuellen Lage	27.02.2022	https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20019.pdf#P.1369
16	100 % sozial	22.09.2013	https://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlprogramme_alt/bundestagswahlprogramm2013.pdf
17	Sozial. Gerecht. Frieden. Für Alle.	27.07.2017	https://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlprogramme_alt/bundestagswahlprogramm2017.pdf
18	Für soziale Sicherheit, Frieden und Klimagerechtigkeit	19.06.2021	https://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlprogramme_alt/bundestagswahlprogramm2021.pdf
19	Europa geht anders. Sozial, friedlich, demokratisch	15.02.2014	https://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlprogramme_alt/europawahlprogramm2014.pdf
20	Für ein solidarisches Europa der Millionen, gegen ein EU der Millionäre	15.05.2019	https://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlen2019/wahlprogramm_pdf/Europawahlprogramm_2019_-_Partei_DIE_LINKE.pdf
21	Holen Sie sich unser Geld bei den Banken und der griechischen Oberschicht zurück	19.03.2015	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/holen-sie-sich-unser-geld-bei-den-banken-und-der-griechischen-oberschicht-zurueck/
22	Warum hatten Sie nicht den Mumm, Herrn Putin zum G7-Gipfel einzuladen?	21.05.2015	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/warum-hatten-sie-nicht-den-mumm-herrn-putin-zum-g7-gipfel-einzuladen/
23	Ukraine - Es gibt nur den Weg der Diplomatie	13.03.2014	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/ukraine-es-gibt-nur-den-weg-der-diplomatie/
24	Aggressive NATO-Politik beenden - Aufrüstung stoppen!	10.09.2014	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/aggressive-nato-politik-beenden-aufruestung-stoppen/
25	Lassen Sie den Unsinn mit Sanktionen gegen Russland	20.03.2014	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/lassen-sie-den-unsinn-mit-sanktionen-gegen-russland/
26	Wertebasierte Außenpolitik ist nur glaubwürdig, wenn diese Werte Grundlage für alle Beziehungen sind	01.06.2022	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/rede-von-gregor-gysi-am-01062022/
27	Ihre Schuldenbremse heißt Sozialabbau, unsere Millionärssteuer	26.11.2014	https://www.die-linke.de/start/nachrichten/detail/ihre-schuldenbremse-heisst-sozialabbau-unsere-millionaerssteuer/

28	Wer die Wahrheit nicht weiß …	25.06.2014	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/wer-die-wahrheit-nicht-weiss/
29	Die Geschichte lehrt uns, dass Wettrüsten keine Sicherheit schafft	27.02.2022	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/rede-von-amira-mohamed-ali-am-27022022/
30	Neues Wettrüsten bringt nicht mehr, sondern weniger Sicherheit!	01.02.2022	https://www.linksfraktion.de/parlament/reden/detail/rede-von-gesine-loetzsch-am-01062022/

Appendix 6: Codebook: AfD & Linke pro-Russian position

Concepts: all mentioned concepts should focus on the pro-Russian sentiments emphasized by the two selected cases as well as the underlying strategic reasons for using this type of supportive Russian position

CODE	WHEN TO USE/ DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE STATEMENTS
Ideology_Anti_Westernism	Refers to the use of any other kind of Anti-Westernism statements, excluding the denunciation of NATO or the role of the U.S.	We want to eliminate the U.S. and NATO infrastructure in Germany that is used for deployment against Russia, devastating regime change policies, and more generally for wars of intervention.
Ideology_NATO	Refers to comments made to denunciate the role of the NATO	We call for the dissolution of NATO. It should be replaced by a collective security system with the participation of Russia, which has disarmament as a central goal.
Ideology_USA	Refers to comments made to denunciate the role of the U.S. at the international stage	However, one gets the impression that there is something that is even more important to you, Ms. Merkel, than the interests of German companies: These are the interests of the American government and the American economy.
Ideology_Anti_EU	Refers to the use of Euroscepticism statements, particularly the denunciation of role/importance of the institution for Germany	Today, the European Union is in a profound crisis. This is the result of social cuts, austerity and the lack of democracy.
Ideology_Trad_Values	Refers to the use of conservative comments in areas of traditional values focusing on emotions such as security and belonging by reinforcing values such as freedom, faith, and integrity	We call for traditional lifestyles to be honored and for the lifetime achievements of women who start families and raise children to be appreciated.
Ideology_Anti_LGBTQIA+	Refers to the use of conservative statements made against the LGBTQIA+ movement by denying the needs of these members application or denial of the existence of this movement.	The AfD demands that teaching and research based on gender ideology be cancelled. The professional qualifications of the applicants must be

		the sole deciding factor for filling positions.
Ideology_Family	Refers to the use of conservative statements made toward a traditional family construct	We stand for the protection of the family as the nucleus of society. Supporting families in a spirit of solidarity is an investment in our common future and an essential part of the contract between generations.
Ideology_Nationalism	Refers to the use of nationalistic comments in areas of traditional values as well as in the form of strengthening the own sovereignty and the increasing respect of national interests.	We want to have our own national German foreign policy in the German interest again, that is the crucial thing, also vis-à-vis our Russian and Ukrainian friends.
Ideology_Sovereignty	Refers to the use of nationalistic comments in areas the strengthening the own sovereignty	Germany is a sovereign country, and it is up to us and no one else to decide which intelligence services we cooperate with and how.
Strategy_Economic	Refers to the use of comments motivated for economic advantages by cooperating with Russia	We are in favor of increased cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Community and support the expansion of the existing gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea (Nord Stream 2) between Russia and Germany, taking into account the security of supply of the Central Eastern European countries. This will put our gas supply and that of our European partners on a broader basis.
Strategy_Societal	Refers to the use of comments made to provide a societal advantage by cooperating with Russia	Let us treat Russia at eye level with respect and appreciation, as the Russian people - not just Mr. Putin, but the Russian people; to stay with de Gaulle: the great Russian people - deserve.
Strategy_Security	Refers to the use of statements made to emphasize a security	A relaxation of tensions in relations with Russia is a

	advantage by cooperating with Russia	prerequisite for lasting peace in Europe. It is in Germany's interest to integrate Russia into an overall security structure without ignoring its own interests and those of our allies.
Strategy_Political	Refers to the use of comments made to emphasize a political advantage by cooperating with Russia	We demand to start negotiations on a German-Russian treaty to achieve and perpetuate reconciliation and friendship between Germany and Russia.
Russia_gov	Refers to the use of statements made in reference to the Russian government	We did not think it was possible. Like many experts, we did not expect this attack by Russia on Ukraine, this criminal act. On behalf of my party, Die Linke, I admit in all clarity that we misjudged the intentions of the Russian government.
Russia_Putin	Refers to the use of comments made in reference to the Russian President Putin	On the subject of sanctions. There is absolutely no doubt that neither Putin nor his government, nor the powerful oligarchs behind the war of aggression, deserve any quarter, and neither does the Russian arms industry.
Ukraine_gov	Refers to the use of statements made in reference to the Ukrainian government	Ukraine has effectively taken away the language of its compatriots in the east, closed TV and radio stations, removed Russians from leading positions and even stopped paying pensions. Where were the protests?
Ukraine_civ	Refers to the use of comments made in reference to the Ukrainian civilization	Let's not look away when the wrong people gather on the seemingly right side! Who has seen the videos of the Azov brigades, knows what we are talking about. By the way, colleague Gysi

		has called these people fascists in this Bundestag.
Ukraine_Zelenskyy	Refers to the use of comments made in reference to the Ukrainian president Zelenskyy	Mr. Zelenskyy has done well. He has countered the concern that he would be bamboozled by Mr. Putin, the experienced politician. That has not been the case. The current decisions - prisoner exchanges, further demilitarized zones - offer an opportunity, indeed.
Ukraine_east	Refers to statements which mention the situation at the Eastern border of Ukraine, the role of Russia and the desired reaction by the German government	The Donbass is and will remain an integral part of Ukraine. For it to be fully reintegrated into the Ukrainian state, however, progress is needed not only at the international level.
Ukraine_war	Refers to assessment of the situation, as well as the formulation of solutions	We all stand stunned in the midst of a terrible tragedy. Hardly anyone wanted to believe that such a breach of civilization could take place in the 21st century and in our immediate neighborhood. Our thoughts are with the many victims, soldiers and civilians from both sides. They all have families. Do the Russians want war? These are the words from a well-known Russian song. The answer is simple: certainly not.
Crimea_status	Refers to statements made to the status of Crimea as well as the referendum and classification of Crimea	Crimea is lost for Ukraine. It will never return to Ukraine.

Appendix 7a: War in Eastern Ukraine - Separation of Parliamentary Speeches

Event	Document Number & Titel	Statement made by and when	Statement (translated)	Exemplary Codes
War in Eastern Ukraine	(12) Haltung des Westens zur Politik Russland	Eugen Schmidt, 17.02.2022	„Double standards are becoming the Union's trademark here. The Union is calling Nord Stream 2 into question and thus our secure gas supply. Do the interests of the USA outweigh those of the German people? It would be irresponsible to send weapons to this region. The political approach […] contradicts the national and economic interests of our country. Good relations with Russia are indispensable for peace and prosperity on our continent"	Strategy_Security
	(13) Vereinbarte Debatte Frieden in Europa sichern – Territoriale Integrität der Ukraine	Petr Bystron, 27.01.2022	„Miss Foreign Minister, I am delighted that we have reached agreement so quickly, because you said that we should talk to each other and that Ukraine should finally be reminded of the Minsk II agreements and come back to the negotiating table. We agree with that one hundred percent."	Strategy_Security
			"Russia has the resources, we have the know-how. It is in the interest of the European Union, of all the states in the EU, to cooperate with Russia, just as it is in Russia's interest."	Strategy_Political
	(27) Ihre Schuldenbremse heißt Sozialabbau, unsere Millionärssteuer	Sahra Wagenknecht, 26.11.2014	"Return to the path of diplomacy! Stop the sanctions! If the voices of reason in foreign policy actually prevail in the SPD - from Helmut Schmidt to Matthias Platzeck - then, please, Mrs. Merkel, listen to your coalition partner. Put an end to this game with fire!"	Strategy_Security
			"You do not have to sit in the companies that are losing orders. You are not an employee or an entrepreneur. You don't have to pay for what you've done."	Strategy_Economic Strategy_Societal
			"In Ukraine, you cooperate with a regime in which important functions of the police and security apparatus are filled with expelled Nazis."	Strategy_Societal
	(28) Wer die Wahrheit nicht weiß …	Dr, Diether Dehm, 25.06.2014	„ In April, an exhibition entitled "Beware of Russians" was opened in the Kyiv Center for Contemporary Art by so-called Maidan artists of the - and I quote - "Ukrainian Cultural Front". There, Russian people are shown in animal cages with a sign "Please do not feed"."	Strategy_Societal

Table 7b: Status of Crimea – Separation of Parliamentary Speeches

Event	Document Number & Titel	Statement made by and when	Statement (translated)	Exemplary Codes
Status of Crimea (Referendum)	(10) Vereinbarte Debatte Frieden in Europa sichern - Territoriale Integrität der Ukraine	Stefan Keuter, 27.01.2022	„The American President Kennedy threatened the Soviet Union with a third world war if it stationed nuclear weapons in Cuba - virtually on the doorstep of the USA. If you ask me, he was right to do so. Why did he do it? The security interests of the United States were under massive threat.“	Strategy_Security
			“Let us talk about Crimea. For 180 years it was Russian; after it was conquered by the Ottomans, it was russified. In 1954, Khrushchev annexed Crimea to Ukraine by administrative act - at that time it was about the construction of a railroad line. Crimea has tried twice since then to return to Russia: in 1994 and most recently in 2014 in a referendum in which almost 97 percent of the population voted to return to Russia. population of Crimea voted in favor of annexation to Russia.”	Crimea_status
			“Mr. Melnyk, I can tell you I can also tell you that we Germans cannot fulfil the demand for weapons, and I can only condemn your unspeakable warmongering. You are insulting Germany, You draw unacceptable comparisons to German history, to National Socialism.”	Strategy_Security
			“Ukraine needs a solution, a solution that takes into account the interests of Ukraine on the one hand and the security interests of the Russian Federation on the other.”	Strategy_Security
			“There is no war, there is no threat of war. There is no threat of a gas shortage. We have to take Russia's security interests seriously, and then world peace will also work out.”	Strategy_Security

			“We look at the EU sanctions of 2014, which, by the way, quite cleverly exclude the USA. The main victims are Russia, with an economic loss of 36 billion U.S. dollars, directly followed by Germany - far behind all the other European countries combined - with 23 billion US dollars. We are cutting our own throats with these sanctions, and this must end.”	Strategy_Economic
			“We only have to listen to the previous speakers to realize that this is an unacceptable rhetoric with threatening scenarios of war and the suspension of gas supplies. and the suspension of gas supplies.”	Strategy_Political
	(11) Lage in der Ukraine angesichts des völkerrechtswidrigen Angriffskriegs Russlands und die Auswirkungen auf Deutschland und Europa	Matthias Moosdorf, 16.03.2022	„The Israeli prime minister […] have advised President Selensky to back down - not out of weakness, but out of common sense. Both sides must now come out of this in a face-saving manner, and above all we must ensure that NATO is not drawn into the war.”	Strategy_Security
			“We will achieve little in the way of rethinking [sanctions], but we will do ourselves a great deal of harm. Through its own special ways, Germany has already become dependent on energy policy, and there is no doubt at all that our Bundeswehr has been virtually ruined by a feminist defense policy that has lasted too long.	Strategy_Security Strategy_Economic
			“It is deeply offensive when social networks allow hate comments against Russia at this moment. It is disturbing that people with a Russian name and Ukrainian roots in have to be afraid in Germany because Russian schools are attacked, as happened in Berlin, and artists are defamed, because restaurants put up signs saying "Russians not wanted" and children are sent home from kindergarten.”	Strategy_Political
	(23) Ukraine - Es gibt nur den	Gregor Gysi, 13.03.2014	„The Basques ask why they are not allowed to have a	Crimea_status

	Weg der Diplomatie		referendum on whether or not they want to belong to Spain. […]Of course, the residents of Crimea are now asking the same thing. By violating international law, you can also create new international law via customary law; you know that.“	Strategy_Political
			„But I remain of the opinion that the secession of Crimea would be illegal under international law, just as the secession of Kosovo was illegal under international law.”	Crimea_status
			“The referendum in Crimea next Sunday will also be attended by armed soldiers. That is not particularly democratic either.”	Crimea_status
			“Now you also want to impose sanctions, as you have announced, if there is no other way, as you say. But they will not impress Putin. This will only exacerbate the situation. Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State, is right. He says that the sanctions are not an expression of a strategy, but an expression of the lack of a strategy.”	Strategy_Economic Strategy_Political
			“When German unity was established, the American Secretary of State, our then Foreign Minister Genscher and other foreign ministers told Gorbachev that there would be no eastward expansion of NATO. That promise has been broken. There has been a vehement expansion of NATO toward Russia.”	Strategy_Political
			“When many violators of international law accuse Russia, the violator of international law, of violating international law, that is not very effective or credible. That is the fact that we are dealing with.”	Strategy_Political
	(24) Aggressive NATO-Politik beenden - Aufrüstung stoppen!	Inge Höger, 10.09.2014	„Now don't think that I am blind to Russian policy. As a disarmament politician, I consider the secession of Crimea to be more than questionable. “	Crimea_status

Appendix 7c: Minsk II – Separation of Parliamentary Speeches

Event	Document Number & Titel	Statement made by and when	Statement (translated)	Exemplary Codes
Minsk II	(6) Aktuelle Stunde zu den Ergebnissen des Normandie-Gipfels	Armin-Paulus Hampel, 12.12.2019	„So let us make use of the perspectives that have been created in this discussion by the French President, not by Mrs. Merkel! Let us negotiate with Mr. Putin about the situation, as Mr. Macron has rightly recognized!“	Strategy_Political
			“It would be a starting point to offer the Russians that we accept [the annexation of Crimea] so that the Russians withdraw their influence and military forces from this region. That would be a solution that the Ukrainians might be able to live with. If we are honest with our Ukrainian friends, we must convince them that this is the power of the factual.”	Strategy_Political
	(7) Aktuelle Stunde zu den Ergebnissen des Normandie-Gipfels	Dr. Anton Friesen, 12.12.2019	“Germany should support Selensky in his constructive and courageous steps. In any case, we should work to ensure that the sanctions are gradually lifted along with the progress made in implementing Minsk II.”	Strategy_Political
	(21) Holen Sie sich unser Geld bei den Banken und der griechischen Oberschicht zurück	Sahra Wagenknecht, 19.03.2015	„The main interest of the United States, he said, was to prevent an alliance between Germany and Russia, because - literally - "united they are the only power that can threaten us", i.e. the USA. This supposed threat to U.S. interests was successfully taken care of for the foreseeable future. This began precisely when the EU, within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, tried to break the countries concerned out of economic and political cooperation with Russia.“	Strategy_Security
			“When we think of what our eastern neighbors had to suffer in the war, we will better understand that balance, détente and peaceful neighborliness	Strategy_Security

			with these countries remain central tasks of German foreign policy. It is important that both sides remember and that both sides respect each other. Yes, only if we remember and only if we respect each other, only then will we find our way back to a policy of good neighborliness, both within the EU and towards Russia.”	
			“If there is now talk of new pipeline routes and increasing independence from Russian gas as part of the Energy Union, then you should honestly tell people what that means: increasing dependence on the much more expensive and ecologically devastating U.S. fracked gas. I don't think that's a responsible perspective.”	Strategy_Economic
			“Similarly, the dispatch of military advisers and the arms deliveries by the United States and Great Britain can be seen as torpedoing rather than supporting the peace process. But do you now want to impose sanctions on the United States and Great Britain as well? I think it would be better to realize that this whole unspeakable sanctions policy was one big mistake”	Strategy_Economic
			“In Germany, as a result of this policy, 3 million people are now so poor despite working that they do not have proper heating,”	Strategy_Societal
	(22) Warum hatten Sie nicht den Mumm, Herrn Putin zum G7-Gipfel einzuladen?	Gregor Gysi, 21.05.2015	„De-escalation and the lifting of sanctions against Russia mean peace policy. Both are in the interest of the Ukrainian and Russian people, in the interest of all of Europe, and in our interest as well.“	Strategy_Security
			“If NATO stops its provocations, then we will be in a much better position to demand that Russia also stop its maneuvers, which I	Strategy_Security

	find adventurous. We do not need a mutual arms buildup now.”	
	“That is the wrong way. Do you know what people don't understand? They don't understand why it's actually not the country's oligarchs who have to pay for the crisis, but pensioners and workers. This is not acceptable in any country, neither in Ukraine, nor in Russia, nor in any other country.”	Strategy_Economic

Appendix 7d: Sanctions Policy - Separation of Parliamentary Speeches

Event	Document number & Titel	Statement made by and when	Statement (translated)	Exemplary Codes
Sanctions Policy against Russia	(10) Aktuelle Stunde zu den jüngsten Entwicklungen in Russland	Dr. Alexander Gauland, 10.02.2021	„If we want to successfully seek a reconciliation of interests with these states, we must accept their otherness, also in the assessment of human rights issues and democratic freedoms. And we must once again follow the classic state councils, i.e. the orientation of policy toward geostrategic and economic interests. “	Strategy_Security Strategy_Economic
			“It is wrong to do without a natural gas pipeline that is useful for us as well as for Russia just because we do not like the values on which Russia is governed.”	Strategy_Economic
	(11) Sanktionen gegen Russland	Armin-Paulus Hampel, 01.02.2018	„Let us end the sanctions as soon as possible, for the good and for the peace of Europe, for the good of our country and also for the good of the great Russian nation. “	Strategy_Security
			„The Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations calculates that the sanctions policy cost us almost 90 billion euros in 2014, 2015 and 2016. […] With these numbers and facts, ladies and gentlemen, the sanctions policy of the West and the Federal Republic of Germany has failed.”	Strategy_Economic
			“Let us treat Russia at eye level with respect and recognition, as the Russian people - not only Mr. Putin, but the Russian people; to stay with de Gaulle: the great Russian people - deserve. Let's end these sanctions!”	Strategy_Societal
	(25) Lassen Sie den Unsinn mit Sanktionen gegen Russland	Gregor Gysi, 20.03.2014	„Sanctions are not a policy, but a substitute for it. But the U.S. is pushing for sanctions because Russia's response, which could be, would not hit the U.S., but the Europeans and especially the Germans. Ms. Merkel, you are here again what you always are with the U.S. government: You are in bondage to the U.S. government.“	Strategy_Political
			“We would have to approach it the other way around and for once not think negatively and not in terms of sanctions. We could start negotiations with the Russian government and say: Okay, the EU and NATO have also made mistakes; that's true. That can be acknowledged; it costs nothing and would be a matter of course.”	Strategy_Political
			“First. Stop the nonsense with sanctions. A new spiral and further exacerbations will achieve nothing. China is not going along with this; this is much more important for Russia.	Strategy_Political

			They will have to take back these sanctions one day anyway. That will be rather embarrassing."	
			No agreements and treaties with this transitional government, but support for the preparation and observation of democratic elections in Ukraine. Only then, with legitimate government and without fascists, negotiations can be conducted	Strategy_Political
			"Russia remains called upon to renounce further military threats and menaces, all the more so the use of force, in Ukraine and elsewhere and to recognize Ukraine as a sovereign state. This must be combined with a clear, positive perspective on relations with Russia on the part of the EU and Germany, with Russia as an integral part of Europe and not on the outside."	Strategy_Political
			"Fascist organizations and parties as well as paramilitary units and other illegal armed formations in Ukraine must be disbanded. The state monopoly on the use of force must be enforced. You must insist on this before you transfer a single euro to them or sign contracts with them."	Strategy_Political
	(26) Wertebasierte Außenpolitik ist nur glaubwürdig, wenn diese Werte Grundlagen für alle Beziehungen sind	Gregor Gysi, 01.06.2022	„You punish not only the Russian leadership but also the Russian people, who did not decide to go to war."	Strategy_Societal
			"What did the sanctions against China and Russia achieve? The goal was: […] Russia should stop the war. Is it happening? No. Maybe we should switch from sanctions policy to offers.	Strategy_Political

Appendix 7e: War in Ukraine - Separation of Parliamentary Speeches

Event	Document number & Titel	Statement made by and when	Statement (translated)	Exemplary Codes
War in Ukraine	(14) Abgabe einer Regierungserklärung durch den Bundesknazler zur aktuellen Lage	Tino Chrupalla, 27.02.2022	„Leave the corridor of thought of the East-West conflict and outline a common future of the European continent. For this, we must remain in dialogue. Possible solutions require concessions on both sides. Mr. Scholz, in your speech today you, unfortunately, reactivated the Cold War; I have to say that so clearly. “	Strategy_Security
			“We reject a new race. That's why: These 100 billion euros for the Bundeswehr, Mr. Scholz, are really crazy. As parliamentary group chairman and federal spokesman of the Alternative for Germany, I will personally continue to work for dialogue with all negotiating partners and for peace.”	Strategy_Security
			“A competition to be the fastest and most effective in cutting bridges to the East, for example, the flow of money or Nord Stream, as Chancellor Scholz would like, or transport routes, so that Aeroflot is no longer allowed to land here. You really have to ask the question: Who benefits from this?”	Strategy_Economic
			„The focus should be on Germany and its citizens as well as on the role of the European states and peoples. Russia is just as much a part of this as Ukraine. Mr. Lindner, there is always hope, even hope in a war.”	Strategy_Societal
			“What social consequences will your policy have for German citizens? They already have to learn to live with rising prices everywhere, key words: gasoline prices, heating costs, rising inflation. Please also think about the signals you are sending to future generations. Do you seriously want to be the German government that sends soldiers to war against Russia again? We reject that, just as we reject the delivery of weapons to war zones.”	Strategy_Societal

	(15) Abgabe einer Regierungserklärung durch den Bundeskanzler zur aktuellen Lage	Rüdiger Lucassen, 27.02.2022	“Germany has no alternative. The German government must now also turn the wheel in the direction of power politics. Power also means having military capabilities. Germany does not have these capabilities. The Bundeswehr cannot defend our country, and it cannot fulfil Germany's obligations in the alliance.”	Strategy_Security
			„Many of you would like to see Putin defeated. So do I. But what would happen then? […] Putin has gone "all in. If he loses, it could become a nightmare: Revolt of the Russian people, revolt of the military, power struggle in the state apparatus. A Putin defeat is incalculable because Russia is a nuclear power.”	Strategy_Societal
			“However, the federal government is also responsible for raising awareness of a new sense of defense among our people. people. Ladies and gentlemen, compulsory military service in Germany must be reactivated!”	Strategy_Societal
	(29) Die Geschichte lehrt uns, dass Wettrüsten keine Sicherheit schafft	Amina Mohamed Ali, 27.02.2022	„Of course, we clearly share the view that Russia is waging a war of aggression against Ukraine in violation of international law. Vladimir Putin has wantonly left the negotiating table and, in the most unscrupulous manner, is putting the whole of Europe and the world in concrete danger of war. This war of aggression must be stopped immediately; the soldiers must be withdrawn immediately.“	Strategy_Security
			“We assess the situation differently today and say clearly: Putin is the aggressor here and must be stopped immediately. His great power fantasies must not be allowed to become reality.”	Strategy_Societal
			“That's why we can never agree to weapons being supplied to crisis areas and to rearmament. Mr. Scholz, you said in your speech that there should be a special fund: 100 billion euros. The Basic Law is to be amended for this purpose. I simply have to make it very clear that we on the left cannot and will not support this rearmament, this militarization.”	Strategy_Societal

	„History teaches us that arms races do not create security. In what we do now, we must keep in mind not only today, but also tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. And in particular, the need for nuclear disarmament on all sides is, after all, more urgent and clear today than ever before.”	
	“The Russian arms industry must not be spared either. That is why we need an immediate halt to the supply of goods, especially in the high-tech sector, that can be used for armaments. There are still major gaps here that urgently need to be closed; otherwise, the measures here also risk being toothless.”	Strategy_Security
	“On the subject of sanctions. There is absolutely no doubt that neither Putin nor his government, nor the powerful oligarchs behind the war of aggression, deserve any quarter, and neither does the Russian arms industry.”	Strategy_Economic
	“We stand united on the side of the Ukrainian people, on the side of those who have to fear for their lives in Ukraine, on the side of those who are on the run and seek protection here in Germany or in neighboring countries. You are welcome here.”	Strategy_Societal
	„We are also in solidarity with the courageous people who are currently defying Putin in Russia and demonstrating for peace.”	Strategy_Societal
	“The situation is different for the Russian population. This cannot be equated; because there is a deep gap between the extremely rich and privileged oligarchs and the broad working population.”	Strategy_Societal
	„We did not think it was possible. Like many experts, we did not expect this attack by Russia on Ukraine, this criminal act. On behalf of my party, Die Linke, I admit in all clarity that we misjudged the intentions of the Russian government.	Strategy_Political
	Even though it may seem impossible at the moment, our actions must be clearly driven by the idea that the day will come when it is necessary to return to the negotiating table. One lesson should be that we become more	Strategy_Political

			independent, especially from dictatorial regimes,	
	(30) Neues Wettrüsten bringt nicht mehr, sondern weniger Sicherheit	Gesine Lötzsch, 01.06.2022	„We from die Linke say quite clearly: There must be no new arms race in this world. A third world war must not be risked. “	Strategy_Security
			„I would also like to remind the Greens that they once fought for the arms industry to be classified as unsustainable by the EU. Why have you forgotten that, dear colleagues from the Greens? Return to this view!”	Strategy_Security
			“We need disarmament. We need a peaceful world order. And I expect the Federal Government to fight for it.”	Strategy_Security
			„If we as die Linke had any influence on Putin, this war would not have happened. There are no top politicians from my party who have met with Putin.”	Strategy_Political