

POPULISTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN RIGHT-WING PARTIES, MOVEMENTS AND NEWS SITES ON FACEBOOK

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ABSTRACT. The new media have shaped the public sphere in several ways. Not only online did political discourse and political marketing change in form and content, but also the places and the ways of communication have changed. One channel, that experienced the most drastic and dynamic changes is the online environment. Social networking sites have combined a multitude of functions and offer users an interactive experience, to get access to all kinds of information, including public sphere, political sphere and traditional media. In the context of recent election results and political events in different European countries, this work tries to examine the way social media is used by right-wing populists in order to promote political ideas and values. Therefore, a data set of around 16,000 Facebook posts from Germany, Austria, France and the United Kingdom were analyzed and compared, in order to present. It furthermore examines the form and type of content used, in order to determine, whether right-wing populists in Europe share a similar agenda, similar strategies and a common narrative, when it comes to topics.

Keywords: populism, European right-wing parties, right-wing movements, news sites, Facebook

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Introduction

Right-wing populism as a phenomenon is nowadays not only an ideological stream, to be found in Parliaments among parties or deputies. For a long time, right-wing media and alternative news sites are taking to the internet and especially to social media, such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. The latter is very popular among parties, news sites and movements. Facebook allows communication on a whole different level, in comparison to a simple web page or a Twitter feed. On Facebook, like-minded people can socialise in anonymous groups, follow pages of their liking and obtain news and information, according to their beliefs. The social network lets people share content, either created on Facebook itself (native content) or allows them to share links with short previews from other webpages on the outside. According to Reuters' Digital News Report, 51% of Germans, 65% of Brits, 63% of Austrians and 61% of French people were active on Facebook in 2017 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2017), making Facebook the most important platform among other social media. In this work, I will therefore analyse right-wing populist players on social media, by conducting both qualitative and quantitative analysis of their posts and content.

Furthermore, features of modern day online companies, such as Facebook and Google have to be discussed, which will include audiences and preferences but also algorithms and fragmentation of online audiences. In the light of political communication and political marketing, the web and especially social networks provide new means for politicians, parties and activists, in order to promote certain sets of values and points of view. Here I will discuss the public sphere, agenda setting and agenda building, political communication in the online media and the creation of biases through fragmentation. In order to provide a clearer understanding of what populism in the 21 century means, this will also be subject to an examination of theoretical concepts and approaches to the topic. Populism cannot be described as a right-wing nor a left-wing phenomenon and neither as recent, as parties such as Front National have their roots in the late 1970's and the Austrian FPÖ in the 1980's and 1990's.

With right-wing populists, acting on social media, to improve their political marketing, this work tries to determine methods, types and contents. The qualitative character in this analysis will broaden the image, in order to understand and identify right-wing narrative. In order to make comparisons between the different actors that are the subject of this work, it is of importance to also clarify topics and terms used by the actors. Also, the results will then project (even if limited to four countries) a more international, European context on the similarities and differences in form and context of right-wing populist narrative.

I. Social Media

When talking about communication in the 21st century, the terms of social media and social network sites are impossible to ignore, as a vast number of today's communication happens on such sites and applications. Simon Lindgren (2017) writes that "[p]opular sites that emerged in the 2.0 era are Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and these differ largely from the old web as they are designed to allow for new levels of user interactions, and to fill very different functions altogether", giving a first insight on how social media are connected to the idea of web 2.0, also called the social web. Castells (2011) connects with Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 "[t]he development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global". He further mentions his own predictions about "the formation of a multimodal, multichannel system of digital communication that integrates all forms of media" (ibid., 2011).

The important emphasis here remains the root, the so called *web 2.0 era* and its evolution and transition, which makes it important to examine significant differences in social media themselves, as well as the changes of the early stage of the social web, from the early 2000's, compared to today. When examining the beginnings of social media, networks and other online communities, it can be noticed that "most

Web 2.0 platforms started out as indeterminate services for the exchange of communicative or creative content among friends. These services often emanated from community-bound initiatives – a group of college students, photo aficionados, video enthusiasts – who adopted a specific niche of online interaction and developed a mediated routine practice” (van Dijck 2013). Another important characteristic is also given by Taddicken and Schmidt (2017) in their manual for social media, stating that “[s]ocial media also changes the structures of social public: They break the dominance of ‘mass communication’ mode and its institutionalized forms, as they provide other modes, arenas and contexts, which make different communication contents accessible, for a (potentially) larger number of persons” highlighting the shift that social media can provide to users and content generators, often making both one and the same. The individual can address another or the group, be a consumer and a producer at the same time and reach a rather large audience with a comparatively low effort by re-packaging already existing content, that is already accessible in the same community or on the same platform.

Cass R. Sunstein (2018) refers to “the power of personalization, or gated communities, which can diminish individual freedom and endanger self-government itself”, when referring to echo chambers. Furthermore, Sunstein emphasizes that “[t]hese claims raise serious questions about online behaviour and uses of social media, and the astonishing growth in the power to choose-to screen in and screen out” (ibid., 2018). Sunstein highlights that in a functioning democracy, echo chambers or bubbles would not exist, as the flow of different information with opposing view points would not be prevented by such spaces or processes. Williams et al. (2015) see that “[s]uch grouping of like with like on social networks (‘homophily’) is believed to arise from both preferential connections to similar individuals when forming/breaking links and also from peer influence making linked individuals more similar”.

Chan and Fu (2017), when referring to a work published by Sunstein, state that he “lists out three possible reasons to explain why

polarization is caused by cyberbalkanization, namely selective exposure, social comparison, and social corroboration. However, his explanations rest only on online information seekers (readers)". This furthermore, sees the initiation of the process more on the side of the consumer, rather than the provider or the producer.

II. Political Communication

For Jürgen Habermas (2006), the *political public sphere* stands at the core of political communication and within it, the political system, with its institutions and the outcome, that can be seen in the decision making measures. He continues by stating that "[a]t the periphery of the political system, the public sphere is rooted in networks for wild flows of messages [...] from various types of actors" (ibid., 2006). He furthermore sees such messages "selected and shaped by mass-media professionals and received by broad and overlapping audiences" (ibid., 2006). In his concluding remarks, Habermas furthermore states that "[i]n the context of liberal regimes, the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend instead to lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics" (ibid., 2006). This will later be discussed, as the idea appeals to the previous paragraph of algorithms and the way, they change and fragment communication. When examining Habermas' theory of the public sphere and the proposed model of communication, Dahlberg (2004) states that "it must be noted that the conception is an idealization, useful for the critical evaluation of the democratic value of everyday informal deliberations, and only able to be approximated in practice". This point reflects the opinion of my theorists, who are critic of Habermas' idealized model of political communication and the public sphere. Nevertheless, Habermas (2006) gives one of the most considered approaches in creating a model of communication, that includes the political sphere, the public sphere and the diffusion and flow of communicative action and information through intermediaries, such as mass-media, lobbies or civil society.

Dahlgren (2005) finds that “[n]ot surprisingly, recent research has shown that online discussions do not always follow the high ideals set for deliberative democracy”, in an early article on political communication that also takes online communication into consideration. He further emphasizes that a lack of rationality and tolerance can be observed, when different viewpoints find confrontation in an online medium, and also highlights the way of communication, stating that “the forms of interaction are not always so civil” (ibid., 2005).

In the light of mass communication, Manuel Castells also introduces the discussion for social movements, stating that these “tend to be fragmented, localistic, single-issue oriented, and ephemeral, either retrenched in their inner worlds, or flaring up for just an instant around a media symbol” (Castells, 2011). He sees such movements or groups gathering around certain similar attributes or what he calls identities in this case, which can also be observed with fragmented audiences online. Furthermore, Castells sees that “mass communication in the traditional sense is now also Internet-based communication in both its production and its delivery” (ibid., 2011). He states that “[n]ewsrooms in the newspaper, television, and radio industries have been transformed by the digitization of news and its relentless global/local processing” (ibid., 2011). Castells highlights the approximation of different media on social platforms as parts of the internet, which combines these media to a new form of mass media.

As for the promotion of political ideas, programmes or public policy, “[t]argeting key voter groups within the election cycle is important if parties are to retain, or gain, office. Similarly, parties also need to maintain and enhance their image and policies outside the election cycle, if they are to succeed in the current political climate” (Baines, Paul R.; Harris, Phil; Lewis Barbara R. 2002). For political communication, social media and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter could therefore be a useful tool for political parties and interest groups. Political marketing can therefore be done through such channels. Furthermore, Baines, Harris and Lewis also found that “[t]his includes amassing and analysing constituency data (from various

sources), determining who are the main sources of competition, identifying and targeting individuals and groups of voters, and then performing a post-mortem to determine where the process could be modified to make it more efficient in future political campaigns” (ibid., 2002). In the light of recent developments, where it gets more and more necessary for actors on social media, to base campaigns on the data of target audiences, these findings highlight the importance of social media and mass communications outside the traditional media for political actors.

III. Populism

At its core, this work aims to examine right-wing populist parties, movements and news sites on social media and it is important to also present and examine different theoretical approaches on the topic, term and the different political streams. Katrin Priester (2008) writes about the term itself that “as a media-reinforced negative attribution, populism means nothing more than demagoguery. Demagogues have been understood since ancient times as peoples’ seducers, who use hounding and agitation to appeal to emotions, fears and prejudices, and are more sensitive to feelings and instincts than reason and political judgment”. Priester highlights here the contrast between feelings and reason, that is often referred to, when discussing populism as a political stream. This goes hand in hand with her reference to the appeal to emotion, which shows another motive in recent discussions over the term and actors that could be counted as populists, being parties, groups or individuals.

Francisco Panizza (2005) writes that “populism is part of the modern political landscape and will remain so in the future”. He states that populism is “a mode of identification available to any political actor operating in a discursive field in which the notion of the sovereignty of the people and its inevitable corollary, the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, are core elements of its

political imaginary” (ibid., 2005). Panizza already highlights characteristics, such as the definitions of a *we* and *them* in populist rhetoric and also emphasizes the discourse itself as an important element of populism or populist political streams themselves. Albertazzi and McDonnell (2007) give a similar definition of the term by stating that populism is “an ideology which pits a virtuous and homogenous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice”. Here, not only the competitive component of one entity against another is included but also the focus on rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice, attaching a further socio-political and arguably cultural meaning or requirement to the term. A topic based approach to populism, Gianpietro Mazzoleni (2017) states that “[i]n Europe, The US and in other liberal democracies, there were appearing signs of new directions in domestic politics, new climates of opinion, new clames that had to do with the challenges of globalization, immigration, corruption”. Furthermore, he introduces a focus on issues that today’s populism is working with. He writes that “the controversial issues are devolution, defence of national sovereignty, anti-Islam sentiments, no-euro, and others” (ibid., 2017), drawing an image of a nationalistic, protective populism in Europe and the United States, on the basis of these issues.

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populism and mass media. It is stated that “[t]he analysis of media positioning and use of 19 European right-wing populist parties and movements has revealed multiple convergences and spillovers in the triangle of mainstream media, online media and right-wing populist political actors”. Through a case study, their work highlights the interdependence of populist actors and media, either traditional or online. They highlight that actors “seem to be particularly successful in creating and applying multi-directional online-offline spillover effects, most successfully with blogs, web pages and social network profiles or by organizing and staging events” (ibid., 2017). Pajnik and Sauer here also highlight the effect of online channels on offline publicity and furthermore, the interaction between different spheres that has therefore created. This is also explained by the example of UKIP (UK Independence Party), shifting strategies in mass-media communications, by adapting speeches and content, in order to create a friendlier, non-extremist image of the party. This makes the relationship between contemporary populist actors and their communication modes in mass and mainstream media another major point of analysis and interest, also when it comes to the examination and observation of these actors in social media.

Another important feature of new populist actors around Europe, is the internationalization of nationalists, as their agendas often correlate, and many parallels can be observed, from national sovereignty, over anti-Islam and anti-Refugee stances to sentiments to Euro scepticism. Swyngedouw, Abts and Van Crean (2016) say that for now, “research has focused only on the domestic programme of neo-populist parties and movements. That only limited attention is paid to the international agenda of modern populist movements is remarkable, since their rise is often linked to the consequences of political, cultural and economic internationalization and globalization”. On a Flemish example they further state that “[e]thno-nationalistic populism [...] also finds expression in the international programme of the *Vlaams Blok*” (ibid., 2016). This is only one example for a number of parties from all over Europe, applying similar programmes and concepts.

IV. European right-wing parties, movements and news sites on Facebook

Objectives and research design

In this paper I will conduct a qualitative analysis of right-wing populist parties, movements and news sites on social media (in this case Facebook as an example) in Europe. Therefore, this work combines different fields of theory and study. On the one hand, a main topic are the new media, and in this case especially online media. In this regard, a guiding question will be, whether or not a fragmentation of audience is taking place with the influence of right-wing populist ideology. Here also the discussion for echo chambers will be of importance. On the other hand, as the analysis deals with right-wing populist parties, movements and news sites, also a discussion on political communication and populism will be introduced. I will therefore raise the question, how the use of social media and the promotion through such channels reflects itself in the process of political marketing and political communication. A follow-up question will here be, in what ways certain agendas, either on national or international scale are projected in discourse and what biases are resulting through such agendas.

As a part of the analysis will also focus on news sites and alternative media, the question whether or not such media is of importance to the other actors analysed will be raised as well. This will help in order to understand whether or not a mutual support exists between parties, movements and news sites on both a national and international scale. Are actors from different countries supporting themselves through form or content of messages? The last objective of this paper will be to determine, whether or not, right-wing populists have a common agenda and whether or not they are using similar methods, formats and contents. Do they share certain narratives, subjects and motives, which can be grouped to categories? After I determined all these factors, I will then try to draw a conclusion, combining the reviewed literature and theories with the outcome the analysis.

Concluding on the proposed subjects and considerations on process and topic, the research will try to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the frames and biases of right-wing populist narrative and information from news sites?
- **RQ2:** Do right-wing populists from different countries in Europe share a common narrative and agenda?
- **RQ3:** Does the network of right-wing populist parties, movements and news sites result in a mutual support and a common, national and international bias or frame?

Methods

In order to draw conclusions on the behaviour of right-wing populists on social media and also to establish whether a similarity in form, content and topics exists, I chose to analyse a total of twelve Facebook pages from four different countries in Europe. The full data set consists of 16,110 posts, which were further examined on comments, likes, shares and reactions.

In order to cover all spheres of political and public life, I then decided to include one party, one civil movement and one news site with a right-wing populist character in this work, to be analysed. All actors represent the highest amount of likes on Facebook in their field, which was a further criterion for the choices I made regarding the actors included.

On a large scale, these countries have been chosen according to mediated events, that all had impacts on a European scale. In the cases of Germany, France and Austria, the decisive events were parliamentary or presidential elections. Germany and Austria elected their parliaments on September 24th, 2017 (Germany) and on October 15th, 2017. France held its presidential elections on the 23rd of April and the 7th of May, 2017. In all three cases, right-wing populist parties were major

influences to the events, either on a power scale or on a topic scale, as populists also influenced the public discussion about important topics. In France, Marine Le Pen was likely to win the election, in Germany AfD (Alternative für Deutschland – Alternative for Germany) was predicted to score a major result for the German Bundestag and in Austria, right-wing populist party FPÖ is now part of the governing coalition. Another important topic in this time frame is marked by the UK referendum, which was held on June 23rd, 2016. In all the mentioned countries, the event was highly mediated, so that also British actors were decided to be part of this work. Movements represented in this work are Pegida (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes – Patriotic Europeans against the islamisation of Europe) from Germany and the Leave.EU movement from the UK, which was involved in the Vote Leave campaign for the referendum. For France, I chose the Génération Identitaire, as it is one of the most present right-wing movements, not only in France, as it has also branches in Austria and Germany. For Austria, the same movement has been chosen. News sites included in this work are Compact-Magazine from Germany, which is one of the biggest right-wing publications nowadays. In Austria the Wochenblick page was chosen, as it covered most likes among similar sites. In France the news site Fdesouche has been chosen for the same reasons and also Westmonster for the UK.

In order to create the data set for the mentioned timeframe between 2015 and the end of 2017, the Facebook page ID's were introduced in Facepager. This application allows the user to fetch data according to certain preferences. Here, I chose to fetch all posts, comments on posts, number of shares, likes and reactions, as well as the type of post and the message included. The fetched data was then stored as an Excel and further introduced in two other applications to process and visualize the data. 4899 posts from Germany, 3676 posts from Austria, 3491 posts from France and 4044 posts from the United Kingdom were analysed by the previously presented methods.

With Tableau Public, I chose to visualize a ranking of the ten most popular posts per country, according to shares. The last graphic was further worked upon, in order to establish fields of discourse and topics, in order to create an overview of subjects.

KH Coder was then used for further qualitative analysis. The application allows the user to generate tables and infographics, based on word and sentence similarities. On the one hand, a graphic was created for each country, showing the relationship between words used more often. This further sets the words into groups and establishes topic relationships. Then, two more graphics were created for each country, with prepared codes, based on topics which were discussed by each actor. The codes were written manually, according to an overall comparison of all actors and the content obtained. It consists of a list of words, taken from the data, so that fields of topics could be established. The list for each language consists of the same set of words. Here several main fields or categories were established, in order to create these visualisations. One shows a focus on categories by source, the other one shows the categories and the intensity of their appearance on a time scale for each year.

Case study: Germany (4899 posts)

Alternative for Germany (AfD – Alternative für Deutschland) is the youngest party elected to the German Parliament during the general election on September 24th, 2017. Since the founding of the party in 2013, she is now present in several federal Parliaments and obtained 12,6% of votes during the general election. “This right-wing populism is not conservative, even though a lot of its demands sound like they are from the 50’s. On the contrary: It wants, as a response to the challenges of time, another society” (Drobinski 2016), writes German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* about the party and its political orientation.

The PEGIDA movement (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West – Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes) was founded in late 2014 in Germany by Lutz Bachmann and other individuals, organizing several protests in the eastern part of the country in cities like Dresden or Leipzig. The movement then spread all over the country and several other branches were founded all over the country. “In Dresden they organized demonstrations against the immigration and asylum policy in Germany and Europe” (Zeit 2015) writes German newspaper *Die Zeit* about Pegida’s topic orientation. Furthermore, the newspaper writes that who wants to find out about Pegida, “ends up at the beginning, in the end: on Facebook. There, the group around Lutz Bachmann, promoted their first demonstrations. There she still does it today” (Schönian 2017).

Popular posts - Germany

<p>AfD(photo): “Bei der Polizei melden sich 80 Menschen, die angeben, Opfer von Straftaten geworden zu sein. 60 Anzeigen wegen Sexualdelikten und Diebstählen liegen vor. „Wir gehen von weiteren Taten aus, die uns noch nicht angezeigt wurden“, sagt Albers. Der Polizeipräsident sprach von Sexualdelikten in sehr massiver Form und einer Vergewaltigung.“ Ist dies das “weltoffene und bunte” Deutschland, was Merkel sich gewünscht hat? Ist es dies was sie meinte, als Sie davon sprach, fremden Kulturen gegenüber Offenheit, Toleranz und Nächstenliebe zu zeigen?</p>	<p>AfD(photo): +++Teilen! Merkel gibt uns den Rest!+++ Ab 2018 dürfen allein 390.000 Syrer ihre Familien nachholen. Geht man von 5 Familienmitgliedern aus, bedeutet das eine zusätzliche Einwanderung von 2 Millionen Personen! Welche immensen Auswirkungen dies auf die I 11.007 shares</p>	<p>AfD(photo): +++Teilen! Anreize abschaffen: Vorbild für Deutschland?+++ Wer tatsächlich vor Krieg und Vertreibung flüchtet, der benötigt ausschließlich Schutz und eine menschenwürdige Unterkunft - und das soll er, nach Meinung der zukünftigen Regierungskoalition aus</p>	<p>AfD(photo): Nadja N. deckte als Mitarbeiterin der</p>	<p>AfD(video): +++Teilen: Zweites Deutsches Fakefernsehen in Aktion!+++ Gestern bei “Klartext” im ZDF: Kanzlerin Merkel stellt sich den Zuschauerfragen. Hört sich zunächst mutig an, war es aber gar nicht - denn während der Sendung hielt der Moderator versehentlich und</p>
<p>AfD(photo): Wer als Asylbewerber sein Gastrecht verwirkt, weil er andere wegen ihrer Volksgruppe, Religion oder Sexualität attackiert, muss gehen! Eine getrennte Unterbringung der Flüchtlinge nach Ethnien und Religionen, wie von Thüringens Ministerpräsident Ramelow gefordert, ist unsinnig und nicht durchdacht. Wie soll bei getrennter Unterbringung eine Integration möglich sein? Soll die Trennung von anderen Volksgruppen solange dauern, wie diese Menschen hier leben? Denn was ändert sich an dem Konfliktpotential, wenn man das Aufeinandertreffen verschiedener Kulturen zeitlich verzögert? Genau, auch die Auseinandersetzungen würden nur zeitlich verzögert. Typisch Linke Ideologie, fernab jeglicher Realität. Der Staat hat die Pflicht, die Menschen zu schützen. Toleranz kann nicht so weit gehen, dass der Rechtsstaat aufgegeben wird.</p>	<p>AfD(photo): +++Teilen: Das muss Deutschland wissen!+++ Deutschland ist ein Land, in dem vor allem im Bundestag gut und gerne gelebt wird. In der fast 12jährigen Regierungszeit Angela Merkels, also zwischen November 2005 und September 2017, genehmigten sich die Abgeor AfD(photo): Erster Trend um 18 Uhr, die #AfD klarer Wahlsieger und in allen Landesparlamenten vertreten: 7.491 shares</p>	<p>AfD(photo): “Einer der Gründe, weswegen muslimische Männer Frauen vergewaltigten oder belästigten, ist, wie sie gekleidet waren. Wenn sie halbnackt und parfümiert herumlaufen, passieren eben</p>	<p>AfD(photo): Weil die</p>	<p>AfD(video): Frau Merkel beim Ablegen Ihres Amtseides. Die Gegenüberstellung der Eidesformel mit der Realität offenbart das Versagen der Bundeskanzlerin in ihrem ganzen Ausmaß! Musik: “Low Horizon” von Kai Engel Attribution 4.0</p>

Type
photo
video

Figure 1. Most popular posts – Germany

In a raking of the ten most popular posts issued by German Facebook accounts (according to shares), several main categories could be established, when taking the content into consideration. All in all, eight posts featured photos and two posts had a video attached to them. Furthermore, all most popular posts were published by the account of AfD. The most popular topics were on the one hand Asylum and Refugees, as AfD writes that “[u]ncontrolled entry means that criminal cannot be identified” (Alternative für Deutschland 2016). On the other hand, the projection of Angela Merkel as the only responsible person and a representative of the political system and established parties is another main topic. AfD states that “Merkel gives us the rest” (Alternative für Deutschland 2017), implying the government would prefer refugees over German citizens. An establishment critique was the third most favourite category. Furthermore, topics such as the European Union, criminal Immigrants and Islam also appeared throughout the posts.

On a scale of co-occurrences in the discourse of German Facebook pages it can be observed, that AfD holds the biggest part of discourse. On the scale of topics, it can be observed that refugees and asylum seekers but also Islam and Muslims are major topics of discourse. Established parties such as social democrats (SPD) and Christian democrats (CDU) are mentioned repeatedly and also together. Also the focus on party leaders, such as Frauke Petry, former chairwoman of AfD, can be observed, as her name was mentioned repeatedly as well. Other topics can be observed in mentioning Euro and Greece, Turkey and Erodgan, as well as Russia and the USA.

The main topic of the analysis of sources and topics, shows that Europe and the EU were a main focus in the messages and posts of all three German pages, mostly mentioned by AfD. Also the topic of refugees co-occurred with the topic of nation and people. It can also be observed, that messages also combined migration with messages about borders and inner security. Compact-Magazine and PEGIDA had a closer discourse than AfD and the other two pages.

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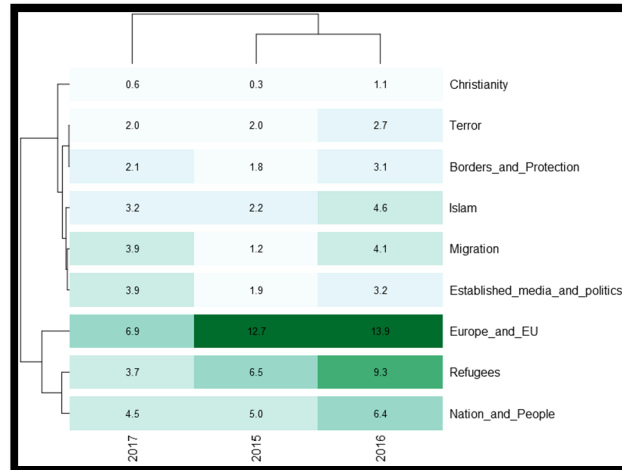


Figure 3. Topics in time - Germany

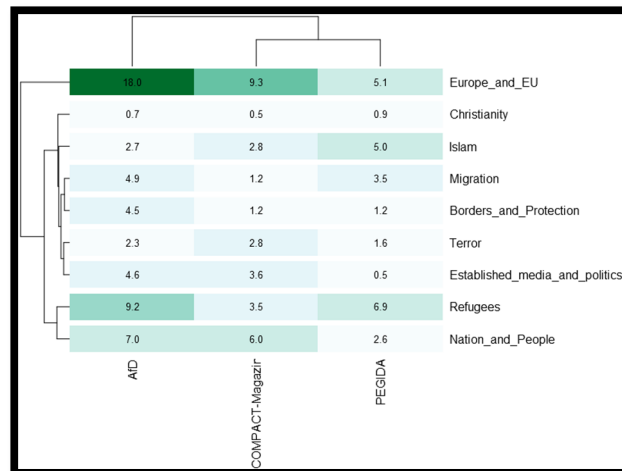


Figure 4. Topics by source - Germany

When observing the development of topics over the three years, it can be observed, that Europe and the EU were the main focus in 2015 and 2016, whereas in 2017 not anymore. Also refugees, nation and people show a similar development, which can also be correlated to the influx of refugees, with a peak in 2015.

Case study: Austria (3676 posts)

The FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria - Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) nowadays can be counted among the established parties in Austria and has a comparatively long history, compared to other parties presented in this work. Currently, FPÖ are part of a government coalition as a result of the general election in 2017. The party holds 51 seats in the National Council, being the third strongest represented there. Anton Pelinka (2002) writes that “FPÖ can be described as a populist party for several reasons: since its founding in 1956, it has criticized with varying degrees of intensity the specific characteristics of the representative democracy of the Second Republic, “proportional” or “concordance democracy”; and in principle it did not rely on an anti-democratic, but on a democratic justification”. Famous party leaders can be seen in former chairman Jörg Haider or Heinz-Christian Strache, currently Vice-Chancellor of Austria.

The Identitarian Movement Austria (Identitäre Bewegung Österreich) represents a rather new phenomenon among right-wing movements, in appearance and methods of marketing as well. Roland Sieber (2016) writes about the Identitarian Movement that “[t]he modern appearing viral marketing strategy has been copied by Austrian and German right wingers from the action-oriented French ‘Génération Identitaire’ and the Italian fascists of ‘Casa Pound’, which among other things occupy buildings, establish right ‘cultural centers’ and ‘flash mob’ against austerity”. The movement is one of the most active actors on several platforms and social networking sites, including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The Austrian head of the movement can be seen in Martin Sellner, who is also the face of most events and one of the most present actors among identitarians, leading actions and events in all over Europe and not only in Austria. The Identitarian Movement can be seen as a rather international one, as it also consists of branches in Germany, France and other countries, who are working hand in hand.

The Austrian newspaper *Wochenblick* is a rather young product, as it was founded in 2016. On their webpage, viewers can find usual pieces of news, mixed up with headlines about identity, criticism about the European Union and Islam, as well as articles on violent refugees. Hasnain Kazim writes for *Der Spiegel* that “[a]lso weekly newspapers and news sites such as the Upper Austrian ‘Wochenblick’ (main topic: ‘Home-Affairs’) and their website *Wochenblick.at* (‘Fortunately, there is not only multi-cultural Merkel in Europe: Orbán, Zeman, Sulik and Klaus – is the sun rising politically in the east?’) [...] are taken seriously by many readers and spectators” (Kazim 2016).

Popular posts - Austria

<p>Identitäre Bewegung Österreich (video) Über Slowenien auf dem Weg nach Österreich! Unterzeichnet und verbreitet jetzt unsere Petition für Grenzschließung und Remigration!</p>	<p>Identitäre Bewegung Österreich (video) Wir fordern alle Österreicher, die mit dieser Asylpolitik unzufrieden sind, auf, sich uns anzuschließen. Jetzt ist der entscheidende Moment. Verbreitet dieses Video, unterzeichnet unsere Petition und werdet aktiv! KOMM NACH NICKELSDORF! SEI AUCH DU DIE GRENZE! Youtube:</p>	<p>Identitäre Bewegung Österreich (video) RÜCKTRITT VON VAN DER BELLEN Mach ein Foto von dir und einem Schild “Nicht mit mir!” und poste es gemeinsam mit folgendem Text auf FB: “Ich wehre mich dagegen, in meinem eigenen Land Kopftuch tragen zu müssen. Die Aussage von</p>	<p>Identitäre Bewegung Österreich (photo) Das komplette etablierte Macht Netzwerk der Medien, Politik und Staatskünstler hat sich in den letzten Wochen vereint und konnte mit einer beispiellosen Angst- und Hass-Kampagne Van der Bellen gerade noch an die Macht bringen. Aber die Hälfte der Bevölkerung hat sich von der Einschüchterungstaktik nicht beeindrucken lassen und die üble Propaganda nicht geschluckt! Für uns heißt es, diese 50 Prozent der Österreicher zu vereinen und mit ihnen gemeinsam die anderen 50 Prozent vom Wert ihrer Heimat, Freiheit und Tradition zu überzeugen! Die Reconquista geht weiter! Wahlergebnisse sind das</p>
<p>FPÖ (video) Asyl auf das zurückführen, was es wirklich ist: Schutz auf Zeit vor Verfolgung! Derzeit findet eine Wohlstandswanderung von Süden nach Norden statt. 6.866 shares</p>	<p>FPÖ (video) Alexander Van der Bellen: Dieser Mann spricht große Worte gelassen aus :-)</p>	<p>FPÖ (video) Auch in der letzten</p>	<p>Wochenblick (photo) Pervers! Die Führungskräfte von “Ärzte ohne Grenzen” und “Caritas” scheffeln teilweise fast 100 000 Euro! 5.131 shares</p>
	<p>FPÖ (video) Alexander Van der Bellen präsentierte sich im gesamten Wahlkampf als „unabhängiger“ Kandidat. Bei der Kurier-Diskussion am 11. Mai wurde er von einem Publikumsgast „entlarvt“. Aber sehen Sie selbst ... :-)</p>		
	<p>FPÖ (video) Asyl bedeutet Schutz auf Zeit vor Verfolgung! HC Strache spricht Klartext. Unbedingt anschauen ;) 3.208 shares</p>		

Type
photo
video

Figure 5. Most popular posts - Austria

The most popular categories (according to shares) of these postings were on the one hand refugees and asylum. Identitarians here “urge all Austrians who are dissatisfied with this asylum policy to join us” (Identitäre Bewegung 2015). Another main category of Austrian populist discourse was the focus on the president Alexander Van der

discussion for established parties and the system in general. Also the name of Alexander Van der Bellen reappears in this table, which could be seen as a personification of established politics as well. Same as in Germany, FPÖ chairman Strache's name appears to be mentioned multiple times as well.

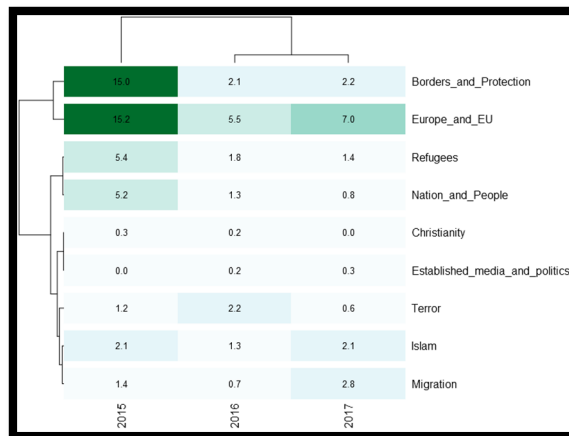


Figure 7. Topics in time - Austria

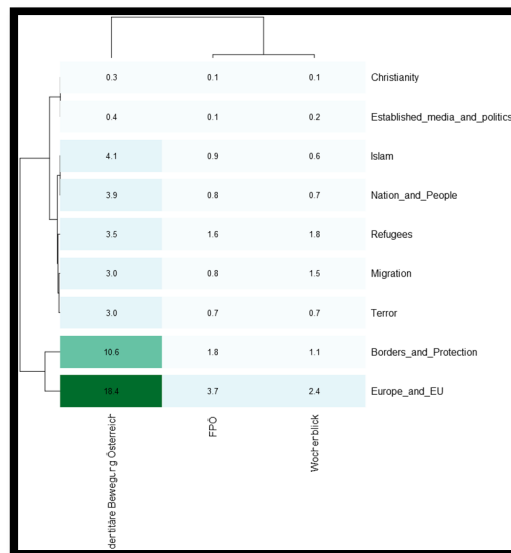


Figure 8. Topics by source - Austria

On a scale of topics appearing in Austrian posts, it can be noticed that the subjects of Europe and European Union stand in the focus of discourse. This is further combined with the field of border and protection. In both cases, Identitäre Bewegung is the actor, who mostly referred to these topics. Overall, most of the established categories were discussed by identitarians.

On a time scale it can be noticed that topics such as border and protection or Europe and the European Union were much more in the focus of discourse in 2015 and became less discussed or mentioned in 2016 and 2017. A similar development can be noticed for the categories about refugees and nation and people. On the other hand, Europe and the EU shows another small increase between 2016 and 2017.

Case study: France (3491 posts)

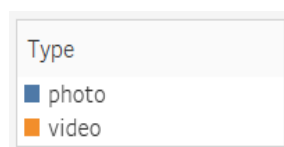
The Front National has one of the longest histories among the parties presented in this work. Its roots reach back to the 1970's, founded under its old leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, until he resigned in 2011. Since then, his daughter Marine Le Pen is the face and leader of the Party. Aurelien Mondon writes that "[i]n fact, after decades of doctrinal readjustments and ideological reframing, it appeared the Le Pens had succeeded in moving their party closer to being a mainstream contender" (Mondon 2014), highlighting on the one hand the party's long history but also the many changes in appearance and structure inside and outside the party itself. Mondon further states that "the 2012 French presidential elections appeared as a reliable gauge for the distance covered by populist and neo-racist ideas in the mainstreaming of extreme-right politics in France" (ibid., 2014), highlighting a more recent upswing for the party's ideals. Jens Rydgren further states that "[t]he Front National shares an emphasis on ethnonationalism with other radical right-wing populist (RRP) parties which is rooted in myths about the distant past and its programme advocates strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and returning to traditional values" (Rydgren 2008), showing a more topic based approach on presenting the party.

Les Identitaires (The Identitarians) are the original movement, out of which several branches came out to existence in other countries, such as Austria and Germany. Cahuzac and Stéphane (2013) write that “[t]he expression ‘identitarian’ is a generic term referring to a current of the French far-right, which appeared in April 2003, through the creation of the identitarian Bloc-European Social Movement on the ashes of Radical Unit, but whose ideas had existed since the late 80s”, showing the ambivalence between old ideas and a rather new and seemingly young movement, adopting subcultural styles and methods of protest, formerly known from left-wing movements. Furthermore, they write that “[f]or the identitarians, it is a question of safeguarding them against the danger that extra-European immigration (xenophobia) and miscegenation (mixophobia) would weigh on its durability” (ibid., 2013), showing one of the major motives in identitarian rhetoric, either in form of multimedia or being in speeches on one of their events across all over Europe.

Popular posts - France



Figure 9. Most popular posts - France



Fdesouche represents itself as a news site of national and international character. Accessing the publications web page, viewers will find articles on violent refugees and Muslims, defaming Islam, the European Union and, what the page sees as EU representatives, such as Angela Merkel, Jean-Claude Juncker or Emmanuel Macron. Founder of the site is Pierre Sautarel, a former activist for the traditional Front National and in recent reports, often referred to as a cyber-activist for right-wing, identitarian ideology. French newspaper *Le Monde* writes that “[t]he French fashosphere has become a good school, to the image of Pierre Sautarel, main animator of the far-right site FdeSouche, former poster collector and traditional activist who launched a line of clothes ‘Pepe the Frog’ in order to seduce this new, young electorate and infatuated with mocking” (Audureau 2017).

The most popular posts from French populist Facebook pages (according to shares) also focus on the use of video and photo material. In a ranking of ten, eight videos were used and two photos were attached to postings. In this ranking, the most popular page is Fdesouche, followed by Front National. When comparing categories, it can be noticed, that French pages had their most popular posts on the topic of immigration, asylum and refugees. Fdesouche for example shared photo videos of stealing immigrants or refugees, walking on a highway, hindering traffic and being kept aside by truck drivers. Furthermore, a second main topic can be seen in content on terrorism. Fdesouche again shares speeches by Marine Le Pen on the Paris attacks and also amateur footage from the shooting. All in all, it can also be noticed that this page shares such footage on a regular basis. Other topics in this ranking are *borders and controls, violent Islam* and also *policies*.

When analysing the co-occurrences in discourse and messages, several main fields can be noticed in the focus. On the one hand, the mentioning of Marine Le Pen, chairwoman of Front National, is one of such topics. She seems to be projected as the central figure of affairs. Also, another main topic can be seen in Europe and the European Union. This is also connected to national affairs, which could be identified as a third main topic of French populist discourse. In this field, words like nation, liberty and defence co-occur.



Figure 11. Topics in time - France

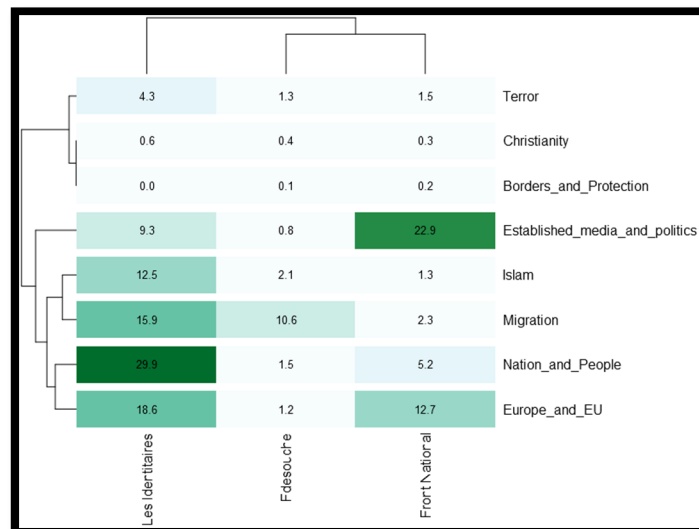


Figure 12. Topics by source - France

Comparing topics on a time scale during all three years of analysis, it can be seen that established media and politics experienced a steady increase over the years. A similar trend can also be observed for the category of Europe and the European Union and the field of nation and people. Migration on the other hand experiences a decrease from 2015 to 2016 and stagnates in 2017. This can be seen in the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015. Furthermore, the field of migration is also connected to the topic of nation and people, as well as to Europe throughout the French messages. Also other topics such as Islam and Terror, who are also interconnected in the analysed discourse experience an increasing focus over the years.

Case study: United Kingdom (4044 posts)

The United Kingdom Independence Party was officially founded in 1993 but had its rise in the late 90's and early 2000's, under its most prominent figure Nigel Farage, who officially became UKIP's leader in 2006. In 2016, Farage announced his resignation as the party's leader. "UKIP's main policy stance is of course withdrawal from the European Union, but one of the party's five manifesto pledges is 'Freedom from overcrowding', arguing that immigration was clogging up roads, railways, doctors' surgeries and hospitals, and even the countryside" (Margretts, John and Weir 2004). A main success celebrated by the party was the 2016 referendum, when a majority of votes voted for the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Currently UKIP holds several seats in the European Parliament (17), three seats in the House of Lords, five in the National Assembly for Wales and two seats in the London Assembly.

The Leave.EU campaign was founded in the wake of the UK Brexit referendum, which took place in 2016. The campaign got active already in 2015 and was a main force in rallying for the UK's leave,

next to other parties and politicians. Virdee and McGeever write that “many of the key leaders of L.EU articulated a narrative of British nationalism that was more insular and Powellite in tone (i.e. Britain for the British). At the centre of this perspective were concerns around immigration” (Virdee and McGeever 2017). *The Guardian* writes that “Leave.EU would release starker, more right-wing messages designed to appeal to Ukip voters and ensure that staunch Leavers cast their vote. Immigration was their key battleground” (Savage 2018), showing similarities in topics and policy preferences to the ones of UKIP.

The Westmonster news site is a rather young news outlet, founded by UKIP supporter and multimillionaire Arron Banks. The site features articles about criminal immigrants, Muslims and refugees, opposing viewpoints on European Union policies and takes on key politicians of the European Union, such as Angela Merkel for example. British newspaper *The Independent* writes that “Westmonster, co-owned by Michael Heaver, former press adviser to Nigel Farage, launched on Wednesday night with a welcome message stating the establishment had “taken one hell of a beating” in 2016 and encouraging viewers to “stick around” (Bulman 2017). *The Guardian* further states that “[t]he site intends to harness the social media following built up by Banks’ Leave.EU campaign to rapidly build a large audience. The Leave.EU Facebook page has 800,000 likes and its Twitter account more than 115,000 followers. Heaver said both would begin sharing content primarily from Westmonster rather than established news outlets” (Jackson 2017). This further shows the close ties between all three accounts chosen from the populist right-wing spectrum in the United Kingdom.

POPULISTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA. A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN RIGHT-WING PARTIES, MOVEMENTS AND NEWS SITES ON FACEBOOK

Popular posts - UK

Leave.EU(video): WATCH: A brilliant, short animated movie that explains why you should vote Leave on 23 June! A must watch. Credit to Piffle TV for the video https://t.co/37ZYaczS1a 275.813 shares	Leave.EU(video): WATCH: Anne Tinnereim, Deputy Leader of the Norwegian Centre Party, recalls the scaremongering that was heard before her country's last referendum on EU membership. Sound familiar? "They said we would lose 100,000 jobs. They said the biggest businesses would leave Norway and there would be no more investment. They said the interest rates would increase	Leave.EU(video): WATCH Former SAS serviceman, Phil Campion talking sense once again. When will our politicians listen? "These people killed last night, they probably sat there last week thinking to themselves, 'How terrible that was in Manchester' and now it's happened to them, and nothing has been done in the mean time! " If	UK
	Leave.EU(video): WATCH: Lies told to Norway before it rejected EU membership in 1994. Don't listen to project fear. Let's make June 23rd our Independence Day! 53.112 shares	Leave.EU(video): Worrying scenes in Europe neglected by the British Media. Vote LEAVE for a safer future. 45.005 shares	UK
Leave.EU(video): WATCH Former SAS serviceman Phil Campion's passionate message in the aftermath of the Manchester terror attack. "They're actively targeting and killing our children. We now have to act and do something quickly. "All these people who have shown intent, no matter how big or how small - whether it be a photograph waving a black flag or turning up to a demo, if you've got stuff on your phone or your IP addresses are reeking of this ideological rubbish, you need to be dealt with straight away. That means you go back to wherever you came from or alternatively you're locked up. "Now is the time to do something about it. They've taken it up to the next level."	Leave.EU(video): WATCH: Former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Lawson, shoots down Brexit scaremongering from the Director of the EU funded CBI. (She wasn't happy) 52.106 shares	Leave.EU(video): WATCH Welcome to Europe in 2017. What a mess our clueless political elite have made of the place. 34.728 shares	

Type
photo
video

Figure 13. Most popular posts - UK

In the overall ranking of the most popular posts of British pages (according to shares), it can be noticed that in the top ten posts, eight were issued by Leave.EU and another two were published by UKIP. British accounts here used mostly video material and photos. A total of eight videos and two photos were published here. Most posts in this ranking belong to the Leave.EU campaign page and another two to the UKIP page. When observing categories in the posts, it can be noticed, that the most common topics were on the one hand the EU referendum, on whether the UK should remain in the EU or not and on the other hand the EU as an opposed, established system. Two of the videos shared by Leave.EU feature a Norwegian politician, trying to explain methods used by the EU and the Vote Yes campaign, in order to deceive British people. Further topics in this ranking are violent immigrants, also projected by amateur footage and also terrorism. Terrorism is here

referred to right after an attack in Manchester on May 23rd, 2017. Also posts on policies and border protection in connection to the British nation are among the most popular messages. When analysing co-occurrences in the discourse of posts, it can be observed that also here several fields and topics can be established. On the one hand the connection of Nigel Farage, as chairman and popular face to his party, UKIP. The field around UKIP further expands to terms such as border and control but also immigration. Furthermore, another field is Europe and the EU, where also words such as leave and referendum co-occur. Also migrant and crisis appear as a connection, and also the BBC and question, which could be seen in the field of criticism on mainstream media.

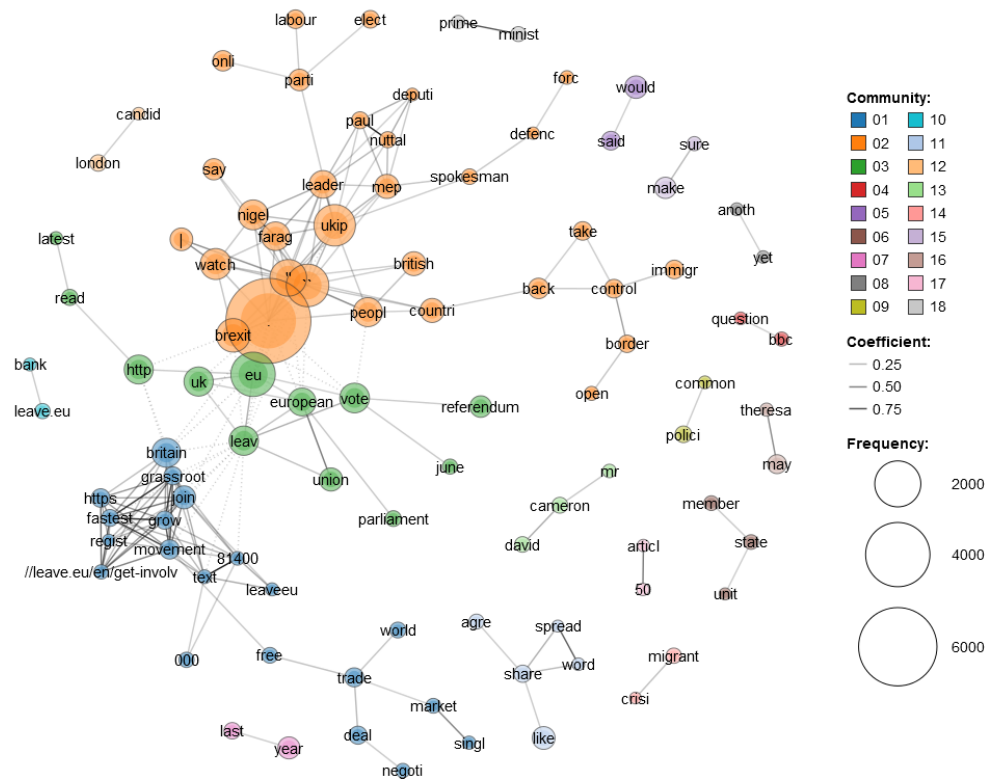


Figure 14. Co-occurrence - UK

When observing the analysis of sources connected to topics, it can be observed that the most common subjects were on the one hand Europe and the EU and on the other hand the field of nation and people. For all three pages, these two fields were the most common objects of discourse. Also, it can be noticed that the messages of both categories show connections. The third largest category appearing throughout the posts are borders and protection. For Westminster, also terror and migration play an important role in messages. Observing the topics in comparison with the chosen time frame, it can be noticed that the field of Europe and EU received more attention in 2015 and lost popularity in the following years. Nation and people experienced an increase in focus from 2015 to 2016 but also lost attention in 2017. A similar trend can be observed for the field of borders and protection. A field that got increased attention is the topic of terror, which experienced an upward trend from 2015 until 2017. Especially in the last period, the focus on terror increased significantly in comparison to the previous years.

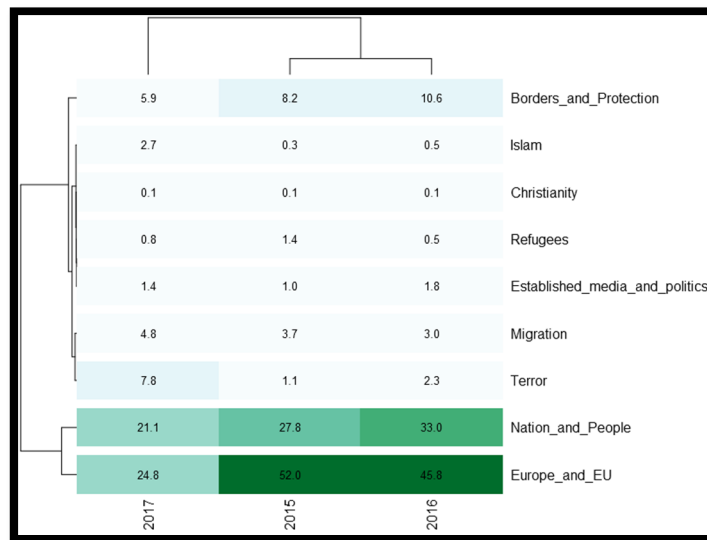


Figure 15. Topics in time - UK

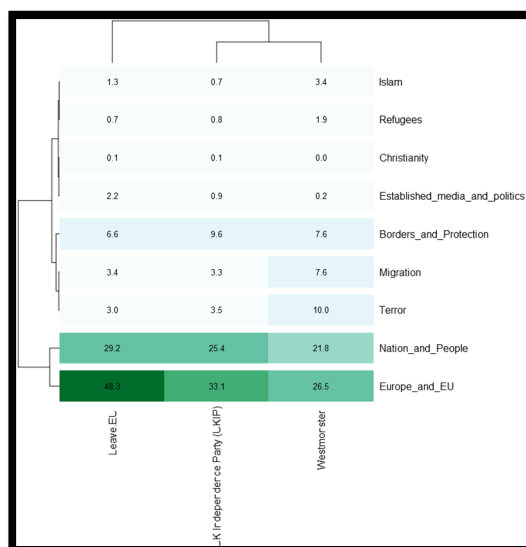


Figure 16. Topics by source - UK

Findings

On the level of concrete content and narrative, the analysis has shown, that the established categories matched the content of different pages, not just on a national but also on an international scale. Most pages issued content about Islam, immigration and Muslims, which was also connected to the fields of terrorism, borders and protection. Furthermore, the category of Europe and the European Union has shown to be a major topic for all pages. In a more detailed analysis of posts, it could also be noticed, that this category is also interconnected with a critique of establishment politics and the personification of certain national personalities, such as Angela Merkel, David Cameron, Emmanuelle Macron or Alexander Van der Bellen. The personality cult is also used by populists, in order to create faces for their parties. Frauke Petry, Heinz-Christian Strache, Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage have all been found to be part of the narrative in all countries, when analysing co-occurrences throughout the postings.

V. Conclusions

In the first place, it can be noticed, that populists on social media, have a good understanding of narratives and types of content, that appeal to their kind of audiences. In many cases, the results showed that the chosen pages included native content inside their postings, using mostly audio-visual material, in combination with text. In the cases of Austria, France and the United Kingdom, the majority of posts in the top ten ranking had video material attached. Only in the case of Germany, where the most popular posts were all issued by AfD, photo material was favoured.

Having a closer look on common topics, the analysis focused on two major aspects. On the one hand to determine subject fields or categories of right-wing populist discourse, by grouping key words and phrases, which were later grouped to fields. On the other hand, the top ranking showed, what form of post and what type of content could be identified as the most successful. All pages showed a strong interest in the topic of Europe and the European Union. Clear content analysis shows that especially the European Union serves populists as a sort of enemy image, which is used for two major motives. On the one hand, an institutionalized personification of a possible enemy, which can be served to an audience. On the other hand, by the use of EU representatives, populists also have a national character or political actor to blame. This could be observed in the co-occurrences for example, as David Cameron, Emmanuelle Macron, Angela Merkel and Alexander Van der Bellen appeared in the messages several times. But this personality cult also works differently for populists, in order to promote the image of their parties. In all cases, several party key figures also appeared in the visualized data. Nigel Farage in the UK, Marine Le Pen in France, Heinz-Christian Strache in Austria and Frauke Petry in Germany. All parties could be observed to focus on their key actors, while promoting different political messages. Vice versa, this serves the parties, to brand themselves and give themselves a face. In most cases, this face is the chairman or chairwoman. Next to Europe, the EU and

certain focusses on personalities, also the topic of nation and people could be observed in a multitude of messages. In all cases, posts could be determined, in which a context was established, that showed the specific connection of the topic to the discourse and contents. Nation and people were mostly referred to as in the need of protection, either by stricter policy or by guarding the borders. A common narrative here was the critique of the open borders attitude of some European countries. Furthermore, the category of nation and people was also connected to the field of identity. Especially in the narrative of Identitarians, either from France or from Austria, it could be observed that for them, nation and people go hand in hand with culture and values. Identitäre Bewegung Austria speaks in this case about “the value of their homeland, freedom and tradition” (Identitäre Bewegung 2016). Another key finding shows the connection between immigrants and Islam in the discourse of populists. Even though both topics do not necessarily share similarities, populists mix them up in their narrative and create new images of migrants, who, in their views, are most likely to be dangerous, different and most importantly, Muslims. As also suggested in the theoretical chapter of this work, a key element of populist actors is the demarcation from establishment. As already mentioned, several figures for established parties could be observed in the analysis. A second part of this opposition focusses on mainstream media. Pegida for example states in this regard “that the rulers and the lying press have managed to brand it negative if you are campaigning for those who are not as well” (PEGIDA 2016). Especially for Germany, the term *Lügenpresse* (lying press) is very common among the here presented actors and in right-wing populist narrative as well.

For the news sites, another trend can be observed. Populists do not have to rely on traditional media outlets anymore, if they want to spread information. Parties can either rely on their own channels or on seemingly exterior channels, such as the news sites, that were also part of this work. Examples were also given for connections between parties, politicians and these news sites, with the most transparent case in the UK, where UKIP was heavily involved in the Leave.EU campaign and

UKIP affiliates were also in charge of Westminster. Also Fdesouche shows a similar approach, as its founder was a former Front National activist. Similar examples can also be observed in Germany, where Compact is promoting AfD and also in Austria, where FPÖ has built a vast communications network, also including biased news platforms such as FPÖ-TV or the platform unzensuriert.at (uncensored.at).

In this regard, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 definitely show the possibility of a fragmented audience, as populists are working and are also succeeding in creating such presented echo-chambers of one-sided, biased information for their political views and values. This is not only exemplified by the news sites but can also be observed in the narratives and co-occurrences that are the subject of this work.

Next to the conclusion, this work also presents several limitations. On the one hand, a larger conclusion on right-wing populism could have been drawn, if more actors from other countries would have been included. Hungary's Fidesz party of Viktor Orbán, Poland's Law and Justice Party or the Dutch Party for Freedom of Geert Wilders could have provided data for such a broader and more accurate conclusion. Also a longer time frame, resulting in more data could have provided a more accurate image of types, contents and narratives. Furthermore, it could have provided a better view on the development of discussed topics and the change of focus on different subjects.

The advantages of this research show themselves in the possibility to compare the strategies and methods of right-wing populists on a European scale, rather than a national scale. In my work, it has been mentioned, that the European right-wing populists met up and chose to work together. In order to learn about this cooperation, this research provides data and results on a common agenda of such actors. Furthermore, it shows how populist narrative works on the basis of events and connected topic categories. It shows how subjects are combined, in order to create certain biases and frames. A further advantage presents itself on the findings about cooperation among populists on a national and international scale. This work thus provides an insight on how populist networks work in an online sphere and how

mutual support looks like, among pages. This serves, to understand the mentioned fragmentation and creation of echo chambers in online media, also on the basis of the presented literature.

Further research on the basis of this work could be inspired by some limitations presented previously. The data set could be broadened and increased with further data from other countries and other pages, in order to also broaden the context and the conclusions. Furthermore, a quantitative and qualitative analysis in the form of another case study with the focus on different social networking platforms, such as Twitter or YouTube could give further insights on narratives, similarities and differences among European right-wing populists. The already existing part of the research could also be extended on the qualitative part, by manually analyzing a larger number of posts, as presented here in a top ten ranking per country. This could be broadened to up to 50 posts, in order to increase the quality of findings throughout the analysis.

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