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POPULISM IN EUROPE: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND (AFD) IN 2023-2024

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ABSTRACT

Mucahit Sahin. **Populism in Europe: Discourse Analysis of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in 2023-2024.** Supervisor: Dr. Aušra Rimaitė. Faculty of Political Sciences and Diplomacy, Department of Political Sciences, Vytautas Magnus University, 2025. 80 pages.

Relevance of the research: The research combines both discourse and empirical analysis of the relationship between populist rhetoric and electoral success, focusing on Germany's recent elections in Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg and European Parliament.

Novelty of the research: The study relies on its empirical use of graphical data to provide correlations between populist statements and voting patterns, offering a visual and data-driven approach to populism.

The research problem: Rising political support of the AfD in Germany and its populist narratives' outcomes both in Germany and European politics.

The research object: Populist narratives of the AfD and its rising votes in the last elections.

The research aim is to provide empirical analysis of the AfD's populist discourses in recent elections.

Objectives of the thesis can be listed as:

1) To do a theoretical analysis of populism using the Constructivist framework.
2) To analyze historical background of far right in Germany
3) To conduct discourse analysis of AfD's populist statements, identifying the narratives and reveal the strategies behind these populist messages.
4) To explore the populist narratives of the leaders of the political party AfD.
5) To analyze the relationship between the timing of AfD leaders' speeches and their electoral performance in key regions and the European Parliament elections.

Defended statements: 1) The AfD's recent electoral gains have a strong correlation with its populist narratives which is supported by the empirical research. 2) Discourse analysis of the populist leaders' statements is crucial to examine political rhetorics.

The research methods: Scientific **literature analysis**, **discourse analysis** for leader's statements; **document analysis** and **comparative analysis**, for the empirical part, are applied.

Conclusions: The research has provided that there is an intertwined relations between populism and constructivism and has revealed the populist narratives of the AfD leaders' statements. Moreover, the research has empirically proved the positive correlation between populist statements of the AfD leaders' and their party's rising election results.

Keywords: Populism, Constructivism, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), International Relations, Right-Wing Populism.

SANTRAUKA

Mucahit Sahin. **Populizmas Europoje: „Alternative für Deutschland“ (AfD) diskurso analizė 2023–2024 m.** Vadovė: Dr. Aušra Rimaitė. Politikos mokslų ir diplomatijos fakultetas, Politikos mokslų katedra, Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2025 m. 80 p.

Tyrimo aktualumas. Šiame tyrime yra susiejama populizmo retorika ir sėkmė rinkimuose, atkreipiant dėmesį į Vokietijoje įvykusius federacinius rinkimus 2024m. Turingijoje, Saksonijoje, Brandenburge ir Europos Parlamente. **Tyrimo naujumas**. Šis tyrimas yra fokusuojamas į politikų populistinių pareiškimų sąsajas su balsavimo modeliais. **Tyrimo problema**. Augantis palankumas politinei partijai „Alternatyva Vokietijai“ (AfD) ir populistinių idėjų sklaida Europoje. Tyrimo objektas. Politinės partijos „Alternatyva Vokietijai“ (AfD) populizmo diskursas ir balsų augimas praėjusiuose rinkimuose. **Tyrimo tikslas**. Išanalizuoti politinės partijos „Alternatyva Vokietijai“ (AfD) populizmo diskursą per pastaruosius rinkimus.

Uždaviniai: 1) Remiantis konstruktyvizmo teorija atlikti teorinę populizmo analizę. 2) Ištirti kraštutinės dešinės Vokietijoje istorinį konstekstą. 3) Identifikuoti populistinius naratyvus politinės partijos „Alternatyva Vokietijai (AfD) pareiškimuose. 4) Išanalizuoti politinės partijos „Alternatyva Vokietijai“ (AfD) lyderių populizmo naratyvus. 5) Nustatyti ryšį tarp politinės partijos „Alternatyva Vokietijai“ (AfD) lyderių kalbų ir rinkimų rezultatų pagrindiniuose regionuose bei Europos Parlamento. Ginamieji teiginiai: 1) Politinės partijos “Alternatyva Vokietijai” (AfD) laimėjimai rinkimuose turi tvirtą ryšį su populizmo naratyvais. 2) Politinės retorikos analizei yra svarbi lyderių populizmo diskurso analizė. **Tyrimo metodai**. Mokslinės literatūros analizė, diskurso analizė ir lyginamoji analizė.

Išvados. Tyrimas atskleidė ryšį tarp populizmo ir konstruktyvizmo nustatant politinės partijos „Alternatyva Vokietijai“ (AfD) populistinius naratyvus rinkimų metu Vokietijoje. Tyrimo duomenys rodo teigiamą koreliaciją tarp politinės partijos „Alternatyva Vokietijai“ (AfD) lyderių populistinių kalbų ir didėjančio palaikymo visuomenėje jų partijai rinkimų metu.

Raktažodžiai: Populizmas, Konstrukcionizmas, Alternatyva Vokietijai (AfD), Tarptautiniai santykiai, Dešinės populizmas

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
BI	Business Insider
BSW	Sarah Wagenknecht Alliance
CA	Comparative Analysis
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
DA	Discourse Analysis
DM	Deutsche Mark
DVU	German People's Union
DW	Deutsche Welle
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
FSM	Five Star Movement
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IR	International Relations
ISD	Institute for Strategic Dialogue
NF	National Front
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
NPD	National Democratic Party of Germany
NR	National Rally
PEGIDA	Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands)
TM	Tablet Magazine
US	United States

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Term	Definition
Constructivism	Theory that acquires the society as embodied structure that has values and norms regarding political actions and relationships. Constructivism is an effective approach, to understand populist leaders' identity-building processes.
Elite	The elite, privileged group within the eyes of populists, have lost their legitimacy and their right to be exist in political arena because not only they are against "the common will" but also, they stole the wealth of people by the structure they built (Metawe, 2020).
Identity	The collective emotion of being a part of a group, community or a society. Populists create identities based on their enmity against elites or externals, to shape political actions.
Institutions	Official or informal frameworks, organizations, or structures that govern economic, social, or political affairs within a society. Populism may challenge established institutions and norms; populists are against radical changes or the dismantling of current power structures.
Leadership	A deliberate act of influencing others to reach a consensus on what has to be done and how to do it, as well as the process of guiding individual and group efforts to achieve agreed-upon goals (Yukl, 2006).
People	People are a construction that refers to all meanings of nationality, common people and sovereignty. Populist leaders use the narrative of people so that they can legitimize their political actions on behalf of the "forgotten people" who have lost their value in daily life and politics (Löfflmann, 2022).
Volonté Générale (Common/General Will)	The entire population's collective will or desire. Populist leaders frequently claim to behave in line with the volonté générale, to justify their activities even if they contradict democratic values or legal frameworks (Metawe, 2020).

Introduction

In today's continually evolving global environment, the simultaneous rise of **populism** has emerged as a critical issue in **international relations**. As populist movements gain strength throughout Europe and the world, altering political dynamics and concerning established norms, comprehending their ramifications for global governance, diplomacy, and society cohesiveness have become increasingly important. The importance of populism in forming foreign policy decision-making processes, alongside its interaction with migration related security discourses, are important for international relations. Furthermore, populist narratives create security visions while emphasizing people's common fears and issues of concern. Populist characters gain political legitimacy by creating a confrontational vision of world politics, which influences policy impact and international relations (Löfflmann, 2022). The development of populist politicians who gather support by appealing to people's complaints presents enormous challenges to established norms and institutions. **Germany**, as one of the leading powers both economic and political of the EU, and its dynamics **play an important role to shape contemporary European politics**. Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland) AfD, has been gained quiet significant appearance in Germany's politics which we will examine deeper.

Relevance of the research: The research combines both discourse and empirical analysis of the relationship between populist rhetoric and electoral success, focusing on Germany's recent elections in Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg and European Parliament. It sheds light on how populist narratives shape voter behavior across different political and historical contexts.

Novelty of the research: The study relies on its empirical use of graphical data to provide correlations between populist statements and voting patterns, offering a visual and data-driven approach. It provides a unique framework for populism's influence across national and international levels.

Research problem: Rising political support of the AfD in Germany and its populist narratives' outcomes both in Germany and European politics.

Research question: How AfD's populist discourse influences its rising electoral support?

What kind of a correlation populist statements and rising electoral support have?

The research object: Populist narratives of the AfD and its rising votes in the last elections.

The research aim is to provide an empirical analysis of AfD's populist discourses.

Research tasks:

1) To do a theoretical analysis of populism using the Constructivist framework.
2) To analyze historical background of far right in Germany

3) To conduct discourse analysis of AfD's populist statements, identifying the narratives and reveal the strategies behind these populist messages.
4) To explore the populist narratives of the leaders of the political party AfD.
5) To analyze the relationship between the timing of AfD leaders' speeches and their electoral performance in key regions and the European Parliament elections.

Defending thesis:

1) The AfD's recent electoral gains (particularly in 3 federal states and the European Parliament) have a strong correlation with its populist narratives.

2) Discourse analysis of the populist AfD leaders' statements is crucial to examine political rhetorics because AfD leaders set the populist agenda, and their statements have become the political reality after the elections.

Methodology: This research applies both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. **Scientific literature analysis** is applied to define populism and its main characteristics. Through **discourse analysis (DA)** and **Constructivism,** populist leaders' speeches, gathered from scientific articles, books, media and interviews, are politically analyzed. **Comparative analysis** and **document analysis** are applied to analyze the correlation between AfD leaders' statements (dates) and election results (votes) of the AfD. These methods enable a comparison of various viewpoints and approaches to understand contemporary German and European politics from the vision of populism.

Research source base: This research, which draws on a wide range of **academic literature** such as books, media, interviews, scientific articles in international relations. Moreover, **the dates of AfD leaders' statements** and **official election results** are also used as data to have comparative analysis.

Structure of the thesis: This thesis is subdivided into four main chapters. The first chapter, "Theoretical Analysis of Populism" explores the notion of populism and its relationship to international relations and collaborations. In the second chapter, "Constructivist Dimensions of Populism", we reveal the relevance and relationships between populist and constructivist narratives. In the third chapter, "Historical Roots of The Far-Right And The AfD's Current Role In Germany", we shall look at the historical foundations of Germany's current political climate, as well as the polarization between East and West Germany. In the final chapter, "Empirical Research of AfD Leaders' Populist Discourse", we will conduct an empirical research of AfD leaders' speeches and narratives using discourse analysis. Finally then, we will combine discourse analysis with comparative analysis using the data of populist statements' dates and AfD's electoral vote results in Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg and European Parliament which were the recent elections.

1. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF POPULISM

This chapter explores through the multidimensional idea of populism, dating it back to 19th-century movements such as Russian "narodnichestvo" and the United States People's Party. We analyze populism as both an ideology and a political strategy, which is frequently defined by the contradiction of "us versus them," dividing "the people" against "the elite." The analysis will concentrate on populism's fundamental characteristics—people, elites, leadership, and popular will—and how they emerge in various political contexts. This chapter will also address the ideological variants of populism, namely the distinctions between left- and right-wing approaches, as well as the implications for international and domestic policy. By researching these characteristics, we want to acquire a better understanding of how populism affects political discourse and behaviors across nations, eventually impacting democratic institutions and international relations.

1.1. Concept of Populism

Populism originated in the late nineteenth century, starting with the Russian term "narodnichestvo" and later in the United States (US) with the creation of the People's Party. In these contexts, it represented an intellectual stance and a political movement that celebrated an agrarian lifestyle, emphasizing communal villages and self-reliant producers as opposed to industrialization and corporate capitalism (Urbinati, 2019). In the US and Canada, populism did not result in regime changes but developed alongside a broader wave of political democratization. This movement advocated for the inclusion of more segments of the population, even though political power remained largely with an elected oligarchy. In democratizing contexts, populism can act as a strategy to shift political power between established and emerging social groups (Urbinati, 2019, p. 114-115).

Populism, as an important dimension of the modern politics, has been increased in many areas from social and civil movements to political parties. In the very basic definition, populism can be defined as a social-political movement which perceives the political order between "us and others", "people and elites" and "good and evil". "People" who have been deceived, mistreated, or otherwise made vulnerable under circumstances beyond their control (Gagnon et al., 2018, p. 8). From a political perspective of populism, it has tendency to reshape its core values according to countries and region needs. Even though populism was used to define the left-wing leaders in Latin America, particularly in the last decades right-wing and system-challenger politicians are often called as Populists. In the European political view, populism is often referred within the xenophobia and anti-migration narratives, meanwhile, in the Latin America it has been shaped within the economic understanding and strongly divided ideologies such as socialist versus liberal values.

Leading academics on populism, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), define populism as “a thin-centered ideology” that believes society will eventually be divided into two homogenous and hostile camps which are “pure people” and “corrupt elite”. Within that strong distinction, populists immensely support the notion that politics should be a precise reflection of people's common will (volonté générale). Following the belief that policies have the entire will behind them, political leaders have a tendency to behave as the only authority to combat with defined "corrupt elite". Conversely, Weyland (2001) describes populism as a political tool where charismatic leaders seek power by gathering electoral support from their followers. Although populism charms its own followers, it can also worsen corruption by using state resources to maintain its coalition. This "delegative democracy" often depends on nepotism and propaganda, while attributing failures to external conspiracies (Weyland, 2001, p. 14).

As a result, all populist ideologies are based on traumatic historical facts; the reason why various policies may be seen in different political and democratic regions is because history and reality have been built and varied independently. The idea of populism has some core elements to derive itself into its society, cores are defined people and elite, however they are also defined with the sub-elements and micro-meanings (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). If we need to conceptualize populism, we might describe the fundamental characteristics as; people, elite, leadership and the common/general will.

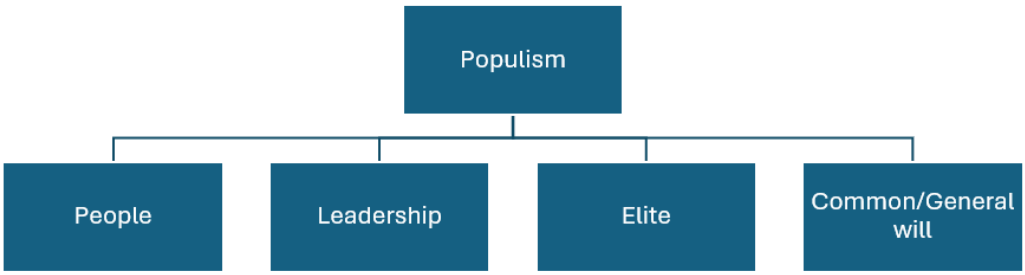


Figure 1. Characteristics of Populism (Made by the author)

First characteristic, “people” refers to a construction that all meanings of nationality, common people and sovereignty. Populist leaders often use the narrative of people so that they can fundamentally legitimize their political actions by addressing that they are talking on behalf of the “forgotten people” who have lost their value in daily life and politics (Löfflmann, 2022). Majority of scholars who work on populism, they often describe it as a hostile threat towards liberal democracies. Volonté générale or the will of people, serves as an essential tool for populist leaders because once they have the political support it also means that they have ability to speak, act and even judge on behalf of the people. The speeches of populist leaders often conflict with the constitution or other core legal texts, as they tend to incite people

to hatred and hostility. If a populist leader's speeches contradict the constitution or other legal texts, in general, the leader argues that these constitutional and legal texts were created by “the political elites” of its time, and sometimes their legitimacy is even questionable. An example of this dilemma occurred in 2017 under President Donald Trump, Executive Order No. 13769, which temporarily barred nationals from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Sudan—primarily Muslim countries—from entering the United States for three months. Commonly referred to as "Trump's Muslim Ban," this executive order is an obvious contradiction to the principles of individual liberty and the liberal value of freedom of religion that have been central to American history (Metawe, 2020, p. 7-8).

Second characteristic, “elite” have lost their legitimacy within the eyes of populists and their right to be exist in political arena not only because they are against “common will” but also, they stole the wealth of people by the structure they built for decades. Therefore, once populist ideas captured the political power, they easily demonize the opposition minorities by using the narrative that they, the people, have been used and exploited by – the elite - the minority. The narrative they use justifies the use of undemocratic and illiberal violations (Metawe, 2020, p. 5). Likewise, the elites are continually blamed and thought to look down towards “pure people” and often criticized to not to acquire the complexity of society’s needs and will. The expression of 'the elite' might apply to established parties, the media, multinational corporations, or international organizations (Oswald et al, 2022, p. 13). Pure, surpassed, angry and silent people not only demand power but also tries to mobilize their community against a well and evilly defined enemy – the elite. In the international political sphere, populist leaders mobilize their followers and guide them through political opportunism and the aim of maximizing their own political support in country’s process of decision-making (Cadier, 2024). Inevitably, populism requires a well-organized mobilization which is generally centered by a populist leader.

Third characteristic, “leadership” can be defined as a deliberate act of influencing others to reach a consensus on what has to be done and how to do it, as well as the process of guiding individual and group efforts to achieve agreed-upon goals (Yukl, 2006). Leadership is, particularly, considered a crucial part of populism not only for the need of mobilization but also necessity of social movements. In liberal and representative democracies, it is easier for populist parties to have voices of the people. Once they got enough political support, since democracy requires absolute majority, populists can legitimize many actions they take. This principle underpins why the style of counting votes and rule of majority are crucial to keep a democracy alive. It also guarantees that electoral representation promotes pluralism and that legislative bodies function based on the principle of non-unanimity (Urbinati, 2019, p. 119). Having a certain level of democracy would gather and assemble the votes from ground, the people, to top administrative levels – political elites. The leadership plays a key role to mobilize and demonize the

opposition by having a certain and serious voice from the ground. For further examples please see the Appendix A.

Last characteristic, “the common/general will” or Volonté Générale, is a very powerful tool used to legitimize the steps taken, regardless of whether they are democratic or liberal. The leaders or institutions supported by the populist movements oftentimes rely on the power of legitimacy given by common will of the people. Regardless of how it is against the freedom of speech, fundamental of democracy or even constitution, the actions taken by the leaders are often considered legit as long as they have the majority of votes, depends on which system they live in. The dilemma here is that populism uses democracy to legitimize its unlawful and undemocratic actions. Even though, populist leaders encourage people to vote and contribute to democratic participation, when they seize power, they shift to a government that focuses on its own base and populist policies rather than inclusive policies, the most notable example of this is Trump's presidency, which boosted voting in the United States. However, at the end of the day, the procedures and decisions made were mostly policies that demonized and polarized those who disagreed (Metawe, 2020, p. 6).

Populism, as an ideology or social movement, is based on an anti-pluralist view of politics: populists believe that they are the solely genuine representatives of the people, and thus regard their political opponents as naturally illegitimate, and external groups as consequently skeptical (Cadier & Lequesne, 2020). As a political technique, populism is based on a from the top, individual, and opportunistic social approach, as well as a chaotic and spectacular political vogue.

Populism is important to politicians because it has enormous potential to gather people and as a result of that mobilization, nations that have been in the populist political arena for years are inclined to act together on certain specific global issues. For instance, most of the "global south" countries, as well as Hungary, Slovakia, and Turkey in Europe, all have political views on Russia's invasion of Ukraine; they either sought to remain neutral or openly backed Russia.

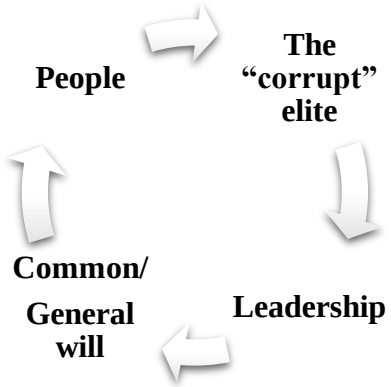


Figure 2. Circle of Populism (Made by the author)

To summarize, in the populist vicious circle, “the people” represent the core mass from which the leader derives his/her legitimacy. A populist leader pretends to reflect the majority opinion of the people, who are allegedly forgotten or exploited as it was claimed. At this point, the leadership plays a critical role in mobilizing the will of the people and mobilizing them against the elites. Moreover, "the elite" is portrayed as antagonists who fight against the needs of the people and oppose their desire. “The common will” is the primary source from which the leader legitimizes his decisions and is often used to circumvent democratic norms.

1.2. Circle of Populism and International Collaborations

Eventually, populism creates an atmosphere in which all aspects of populism become independent of one another. Society requires an ideal adversary known as "the corrupt elite," who is demonized as "a traitor and a thief" who took the wealth of the "pure" people. On the other side, the leader/leadership is perceived as a rival and has the fortitude to confront such "traitors". Leadership is an essential aspect of the circle not only because it has societal support, but also because it may bring people to "the ballot box". As long as the leader can mobilize the society into desired political party, the support does not stay in the society level but also in political arena. From a broader perspective, four separate aspects of populism may have a domino effect on each other both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, once populist leaders gain power through political "common/general will," it will be easier to take political action against defined "enemies" such as elites or any other "undesired" groups to the extent as refugees, migrants, various religious groups, ethnic minorities, LGBT movement, and so on. The circle continues to radicalize as long as all four parts are harmonized.

Moreover, populist regimes have tendency to create a new type of “elite” different than previous ones. Although the existence of elites remains unchanged in terms of definition and functioning, the elites created by populist governments emerge as a "counterpart" to the prior elites. At this point, an “elite dilemma” occurs. The governments who are completely against the “elite” create their elites to combat with previous ones. For instance, Donald Trump in the U.S., the Brexit process in the UK, the rise of Italy's FSM (Five Star Movement) (Eiermann et al., 2017). Hungary’s Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance would also be an excellent illustration of emerging elites created by a populist atmosphere.

The importance of analyzing populism occurs after a successful turn in international relations and global politics. According to Hocking (2016) domestic and international affairs and their policy inputs are intertwined as a result of regionalism and globalization. Furthermore, shifting agendas and the relevance of social power strengthen the role of civil society groups that operate across national borders, usually establishing transnational coalitions and putting further pressure on governments (p. 70). As a

result of this vicious circle, populist leaders and their populist influence on politics aren't just limited to the domestic level, but also have a significant international impact, primarily due to the formation of alliances with other politically similar states. In this regard, although the left and right populist parties in the EU Parliament hold opposing views on crucial topics, they prefer to collaborate regarding EU deepening decisions and other political initiatives. For further information regarding the EU's political parties please see the Appendix B.

1.3.The relevance of Populism and International Relations

Populism is often rooted in the opposition between the "people" and the "elite," and this opposition plays out in the international arena as well as in national politics. Populist leaders and parties portray global elites and institutions as forces working against the will of the people. This discourse can play out in international relations and its effect may vary in different fields.

Populism and populist parties are phenomena that have left deep traces in the IR. This interaction can be examined from many perspectives, and each has the potential to change the balances on the world stage. Populist movements, in essence, emerge with the claim to represent the pure and uncorrupted will of the people, and this claim also finds an echo in foreign policy. Populist leaders generally question the current order in the international arena, arguing that global elites and institutions do not represent the interests of the rightful people. This questioning sometimes leads to a less diplomatic and more confrontational foreign policy approach that defends national interests more directly.

On the one hand, this new foreign policy approach undermines trust in international organizations and multilateral agreements. Populist leaders seek to "liberate" their countries from the influence of such structures, claiming that national sovereignty is threatened by them. This can lead to isolationism or, at the very least, a desire to redefine the terms of international cooperation. For example, attempts to withdraw from global climate agreements or to renegotiate trade agreements are concrete manifestations of populist policies.

Economically, populism promotes economic protectionism. In order to increase the economic well-being of the people, restrictions are imposed on foreign trade and policies that protect domestic production are adopted. This changes global trade dynamics and can cause friction in economic relations with other countries. The economic nationalism approach of populist leaders can create new lines of tension in international economic relations while also gaining support in the domestic market in the short term.

In terms of security and migration, populism increases the perception of external threats. Anti-migrant and security-focused policies increase the potential for conflicts in both domestic and

international politics. Populist leaders can adopt a tougher and more interventionist policies by using issues such as border protection and the fight against terrorism in domestic politics. This sometimes leads to policies that can lead to military interventions or the closure of borders.

1.4. Right-wing and Left-wing Populism

Right-wing populism has been described by numerous authors as a mobilization of democracy, or "the people," in opposition to all forms of liberal narratives that are seen as political theories predicated on the notions of all citizens' fundamental equality. In addition, a number of right-wing populist initiatives result in institutional alterations that, taken together, may push the regime outside of the scope of liberalism (Tushnet, 2019, p. 387). From the view of not accepting liberal thoughts and differences, right-wing parties are generally considered as conservatives, protectionists and even xenopohobic. In an extreme version of right-wing populism might include the idea of superior ethnic characterizations of the “true people” where the tendency is leaning towards racism and fascism. However, populism legitimizes the not accepted values, norms and all kind of exclusions by labeling them as strange and “the other” (Tushnet, 2019, p. 419).

Having understood the basics of what makes populism right-wing, additionally, we need to identify the main elements which distinguish right-wing populism from left-wing. Scholars have initiated a broad analysis and start to identify the connection between emotions and right-wing populism. Emotions like shame, fear, pride and even anger are to be effective on the basis of motivation for vote and political mobilization (Nguyen et al., 2022). So far, political parties and their leaders have acknowledged the connection between emotions and political right-wing tendencies and created political agendas according to society’s sensitivities. To more effectively characterize the populist political approach in terms of emotions, researchers examined statements, interviews, party declarations, populist public ads and campaigns (Matthes and Schmuck, 2017), discovered a vast variety of language and visual methods that communicate (Wirz, 2018), portray and provoke emotions (Breeze, 2019).

To stimulate emotions, scholars and their research divided right-wing populism into three main discourses. First, individual emotional consists of personality, age, gender etc. Second, cultural emotional includes societal measures, lifestyle, and all related consumptions. Lastly, structural emotions such as income, social status (class), occupation etc. (Nguyen et al., 2022). The narrative mainly uses anti-elitist and anti-establishment rhetoric, invoking fears related to immigration and cultural change. Presents a more homogeneous vision of "the people."

Fear, powerlessness and insecurity might be understood as strongly connected with the social structural narrative. Especially in the Western societies, where modernization, economic practical

changes and globalization are so high, traditional understanding of labor is rapidly changing. Such a rapid change creates the fear of losing social and capital status. Changes in the economy and rising labor demands, consequences of changing lifestyle and standards, are also causes of rage and animosity in modern societies where anti-migration narratives emerge mostly (Flecker et al., 2007). Defining “the other” plays an important role to capture potential political attention and possible voters for the future. Populist parties’ agendas and interests might occasionally change in line with the political audience and attention. As an example to it, in the very early times of its establishment, Alternative for Germany had more focused on Eurozone and economic problems such as leaving Eurozone, forcing Eastern European countries to leave Euro and stressing the idea of German dominance on the currency (Bleiker, 2013). However, while the idea still behind, in contemporary agenda those narratives are not stressed as before because all the attention is gathered on migration and migration-based problems. Based on all the factors and justifications listed above, along with examples from history, it can be seen that right-wing populism tends towards more authoritarian regimes where power is concentrated in a single hand.

In conclusion, right-wing populism emerges as a political force that fundamentally challenges liberal ideals of equality by mobilizing the public against perceived elites and "the others". It is characterized by a conservative, protectionist, and often xenophobic stance, with extreme versions, racism and fascism. Right-wing populism tends to legitimize exclusionary policies and norms by framing them as a defense against threats to identity of "the people". Right-wing populism relies on emotions such as fear, anger, pride, and insecurity to shape political agendas and mobilize support. Scholars have identified these emotions as the appeal of right-wing populism, particularly in response to the challenges of modernization, globalization, and changing labor demands. These feelings of powerlessness and fear of social decline fuel anti-immigration narratives and serve as effective tools in defining and demonizing "the other." In time, right-wing populist movements, such as Germany's AfD, have shifted their focus based on the political climate, first addressing economic issues like the Eurozone crisis but later against migration as the main concern. This adaptability, combined with its emotional and anti-establishment rhetorics, helps to explain the resilience of right-wing populism in various political contexts. Ultimately, right-wing populism has tendency on authoritarianism, with power concentrated in a single leader, remains as a main concern for democratic institutions.

Left-wing populism, as an understanding of politics, evaluates the atmosphere by economic status and classes. In other words, left-wing populism is often called as social populism. Left-wing populism's language frequently includes anti-elitist attitudes, resistance to the formation, and raise their voice for the "common people". Anti-capitalism, anti-globalization, pacifism, and social justice are common themes among left-wing narratives, whereas class society ideology or socialist theory are less

essential than they are in traditional left-wing organizations (European Center for Populism Studies, n.d.). As noted previously, left-wing variations of populism are likely to emphasize social and economic relations and may align the people with their social class/status mostly as laborers or farmers (Abts & Rummens, 2017, p. 418). Left-wing populism mainly targets economic elites and advocates for the working class against corporate power, focuses on income inequality and social justice.

Although populism was historically associated with left-wing leaders in Latin America where leaders emphasize social justice, solidarity, and collective rights. Advocates for redistributive policies and increased government intervention in the economy, particularly in recent decades, right-wing and system-challenging politicians are labeled as populists as well. In Europe, populism is generally linked to xenophobic and anti-migration sentiments, while in Latin America, it has been shaped by economic perspectives and deeply divided ideologies, such as socialist versus liberal values (Acemoğlu et al, 2015).

From a critical perspective of Petersen and Hecker (2022), they discuss that left-wing populism or social populism has other ideological roots called socialism and Marxism. The link between socialism and Marxism has both conceptual and practical aspects. Socialism typically advocates for social ownership and democratic administration of the means of production, with the objective of eliminating inequality and increasing social welfare. Marxism, in its place, is a theoretical approach that builds on socialist concepts by emphasizing class struggle as the driving force behind social and historical change. Marxism criticizes capitalism and seeks to establish a classless society through revolutionary means (Petersen & Hecker, 2022, p. 87-89). Ultimately, in left-wing populism, key populist principles like popular sovereignty, anti-elitism, and people-centrism are combined with a class-based response to social issues.

Considering all the factors and justifications mentioned, left-wing populism tends to aim at reducing tensions stemming from class conflict and disparities. It refers to more utopian society where classes are either more equitably represented or ideally nonexistent. Consequently, it implicitly favors a more democratic and less authoritarian structure compared to right-wing populism.

In conclusion, left-wing populism or social populism, emphasizes class-based struggles and economic inequality, defending the rights and interests of the working class against the economic elite. Central to its rhetoric are themes of anti-elitism, anti-capitalism, anti-globalization, and social justice, which distinguish it from traditional left-wing movements that are more focused on socialist theory or class society ideology. Left-wing populist movements tend to promote distributive policies, government intervention, and economic reform, with a particular focus on income inequality and the empowerment of laborers. Historically, left-wing populism has found its strongest expression in Latin America, where leaders have stressed social justice and solidarity, while in Europe, populism has more commonly been

linked to right-wing movements and anti-migration sentiments. However, the ideological roots of left-wing populism are closely tied to socialism and Marxism, which both are against the capitalism and the class struggle. While socialism advocates for social ownership and equality, Marxism goes further in aiming to dismantle class structures altogether. Ultimately, left-wing populism ideals a more equitable and democratic society, aiming to reduce the tensions created by class disparities. Contrary to right-wing populism, left-wing populism tends to align itself with democratic principles and seeks to create a more inclusive, socially just society where ownerships and differences are set by the higher authority - state.

Table 1. Comparative Aspects between Left and Right-wing Populism

Aspects	Left-Wing Populism (LWP)	Right-Wing Populism (RWP)
Main Contradictions	LWP is targeting the economic elites and advocates for the working class (proletariat). LWP focuses on inequality of income and social justice.	RWP is targeting non-white or "others" such as immigrants, framing them as threats to the culture and the nation. RWP has tendency regarding to exclusionary policies
Ideological Views	LWP's realities are social justice, solidarity, and collective rights. LWP supports redistribution of wealth and government intervention in the economy.	RWP is influenced by nationalism, traditional values, and often adopts an authoritarian rule. RWP aims to "protect" identity and cultural heritage.
Rhetorical Strategies	LWP promotes inclusivity and social reforms to support proletariat or other marginalized minorities.	RWP has anti-elitist and anti-establishment rhetoric, having fears related to migration and cultural change. RWP's strategies based on having a homogeneous society.
Democratic Tendencies	LWP advocates for enhanced democratic processes and engagement, often calling for more direct forms of democracy.	RWP may shift to authoritarianism, advocating strong leadership that refers to reflect the "true will of the people," while undermining contemporary democratic institutions.

Source: Made by the author.

To compare, left-wing populism targets economic elites while right-wing populism accuses migrants and outsiders as a main threat. Their solutions regarding the same issue differ because their definition of threats and problems are different. Left-wing identifies the world as economic classes such as exploiting and exploited ones, meanwhile right-wing sees the world as collective, national and cultural identities. The main difference relies on their perception of democracy, left-wing populists often recall direct democracy structures meanwhile right-wing has tendency to use "common will" in the hand of a "leader" which leads in general to authoritarianisms.

2. CONSTRUCTIVIST DIMENSIONS OF POPULISM

This chapter explores deeper into the constructivist aspects of populism, investigating how constructivism's theoretical framework helps to comprehend the identity-based features of populist movements. As a first part, constructivism will be introduced as one of the main international relations theories, the chapter points out the importance of socially structured frameworks such as identities and realities. The chapter focuses on how populist leaders use populist rhetoric to create main narratives, defining identity and who is a friend or an enemy. Through the language and its way of the use, leaders often label adversary thoughts as threats and enemies. By introducing the constructivist theory, this chapter envisions new perspectives regarding populism and its flexibility to transform norms and values of the society. These perspectives allow us to explain the complicated relations between identity, norms and perceptions that create common populist ideas.

2.1. Constructivism as an International Relations Theory

The widespread use of a constructivist perspective broadens the scientific knowledge of populism by focusing on the ideational, identity-based, and normative components that support its establishment and significance. The terms "construction" or "constitution" had been nonetheless very prevalent, and they were used to challenge the assumption that the "world out there" was predetermined, ready to be found by shining a light on existing items or "lifting a veil" from the real world (Kratochwil & Peltonen, 2022, p. 5).

According to Hoffman (2010), constructivism originated in the 1980s and 1990s as a reaction to the inadequacies of classic rationalist and metarialist ideas, notably neorealism and neoliberalism. It launched a paradigm change by highlighting the importance of norms, ideas, beliefs, and identities in molding state behavior and international achievement. Constructivism was and persists to be a radically different approach to international relations than its former opponents. Unlike other methods, constructivism has been stated as a social theory. Because of this, it always lacks explicit commitments to the basic principles of international relations theories, including the identity, character, interests, and actions of crucial people, as well as the framework of global politics (Hoffman, 2010). Alexander Wendt (1995) effectively highlights the concept of socially constructed reality by illustrating why 500 British nuclear missiles are interpreted as a much lower danger to the US than five North Korean ones. That mindset stems not from the nuclear weapons themselves (the material structure) but from the significance attributed to them (the ideational structure). On top of that, interests and identity provide a major constructivist cause for concern. Constructivists assert that governments' relationships with other actors may shape a variety of identities for them. Constructivists contend that our identities influence our

behaviors and interests because identities are a reflection of an actor's interests and self-concept (Theys, 2017, p. 37).

As mentioned above, one of the leading scholars working on Constructivism, Wendt, developed a concept called “structure of identity and interest” and an important core concept of constructivism, mankind responds in certain ways toward objects, particularly other actors, depending on the meaning these objects have for them. States react distinctively towards adversaries than toward allies since friends are not frightening but rivals are (Wendt, 1992). In other words, constructivism is an approach used to explore intangible and difficult-to-analyze concepts in the social sciences by examining emotions, social frameworks, how society forms and gains knowledge, and how it defines an enemy. Moreover, constructivism, defined as principled critique, demonstrates how difficult it is to apply the scientific method in analyzing the social and practical realities, but its criticism may also be directed at itself (Kratochwil & Peltonen, 2022, p. 15). Wendt (1992), one of his articles focusing on populism and political vision, states that a core tenet of constructivist theory is that individuals and states react to things based on the meanings they carry for them. For instance, states behave differently toward adversaries compared to allies, as adversaries are perceived as threats while allies are not. The concepts of anarchy and power distribution alone cannot determine these distinctions. As an example, the US’ military power has a different meaning for Canada than it does for Cuba, despite their comparable "structural" positions, just as British missiles hold different significance for the United States compared to Soviet missiles (Wendt, 1992, p. 396-397).

Perception of an opponent or adversary is an important aspect in developing an identity. While constructing it, society not only uses the opponent but also seeks to bring together their traditions, customs, and norms. States that adhere to a certain identity are obligated to respect the norms and standards associated with that identity. This theory implies that certain types of actions and behaviors are more permitted than others. This approach is also known as 'the logic of appropriateness', when individuals react in specific ways because they feel it is suitable (Theys, 2017, p. 38).

Language and definitions, according to Constructivism, play a crucial part in determining who is good and who is evil. Once a minority or political group is labeled as "corrupted", "evil", or "other" by a Populist leader, the targeted minority will be subjected to the ideology. According to other key Onuf, all social norms, not simply instructional rules, are inherently and continuously regulative and constitutive. Onuf characterizes language as a critical instrument for leaders to create their policies, with the leader's speech making language performative (Onuf, 1989). Language is essential for the creation of norms and interpretation; therefore it serves as the foundation for the emergence of identities (Fierke, 2016). In the

context of populism, constructivism's complicated process of building an identity is crucial. Populist leaders effectively construct identities based on a conflict between "the people" and externalized "others."

Constructivists' fundamental approach is based on the idea that constructivism allows researchers to evaluate disputes and relationships between global actors in a more methodical and sophisticated manner, by using the approaches the balance of power, the nature of power and the security dilemma (McDonald, 2018, p. 49). In the meantime, constructivists stress the importance of ideational elements that contribute to these conceptions, manners, and dynamics of security, which are typically overlooked in realist views of international politics. Constructivists argue that governments choose to follow recognized standards not only because it benefits their interests *(a logic of instrumentality)* but also because failure to do so would result in penalties *(a logic of consequences).* Constructivists also suggest that internal ideational issues play an essential role in shaping security conceptions and practices. Constructivists, in particular, place great emphasis on national identity (McDonald, 2018, p. 51).

In conclusion, the constructivist approach, its application to populism, offers a comprehensive understanding of how identity and normative realities shape the behaviors and interactions of the states and other actors. Constructivism emphasizes that the world is socially constructed, shaped by shared ideas and identities rather than solely material structures. Scholars like Alexander Wendt illustrate that states' actions are influenced not by the threats posed by weapons or power distribution but by the meanings to them, highlighting the importance of perception and identity. Constructivism assumes that identities are formed through relationships and interactions with other actors, easy as enemies and allies, and these identities shape state behavior. Language plays an important role in shaping these identities, especially in the populist context, where leaders use rhetoric to define "the people" or "others." Constructivism's focus on ideational elements, norms, and the logic of appropriateness helps explain why certain actions and behaviors are perceived as more acceptable or legitimate in different contexts. Overall, constructivism provides a framework to examine global politics, allow us to have a deeper exploration of how ideas, identities, and norms influence security dynamics and political behavior. It challenges traditional realist views by supporting the idea that internal ideational factors, such as national identity, play a crucial role in shaping international relations and security conceptions.

2.2. Relevance between Constructivism and Populism

Understanding constructivism is critical for evaluating populism because it provides a framework for investigating the ideological and identity-based origins that drive populist movements. Unlike typical materialist or rationalist methods, which concentrate primarily on physical elements such as economic conditions or power conflicts, constructivism stresses the role of ideas, identities and norms in creating political conduct. Populism, by definition, relies on the creation of "us vs. them" narratives in which leaders identify themselves and their followers in opposition to an "elite" or "the other". The process is essentially social and ideational; therefore, constructivism is a valuable lens for examining how these narratives emerge and influence into society.

Constructivism explains how populist leaders manage perceptions, creating enemies and allies based not just on financial concerns, but also on socially created identities. For example, populist discourse frequently draws on national identity, cultural values, and emotional reactions to perceived mostly for social threats. By using the constructivism, we may investigate how these narratives are created and why they find a response from particular groups. Furthermore, constructivism emphasizes the flexible nature of political identities, demonstrating how populist movements may change and adapt to shifting political environments. In essence, constructivism gives the means for decoding the complex social and ideational processes that feed populism, making it an essential method for understanding its growth and influence. Constructivist perspective on the study of populism helps to get beyond typical interpretations centered around materialist determinism. Populist movements, as they are said, actively contribute to the creation of specific identities, narratives, and norms, necessitating an examination of populism's numerous constructivist characteristics. In another words, constructed identity sets what is good or bad, what is pure or evil, what is “people” or “elite”. Consequently, populism reshapes the community to set new rules against “corrupted elites”.

According to Kappenberg (2019), constructivist theorists view the creation of identity as a social activity in which multidimensional interactions change how societies perceive others versus themselves. Identities are inextricably linked to cultural, historical, political, and socioeconomic contexts. Constructivism acknowledges that shared ideas, values, and beliefs form normative frameworks that provide meaning to material formations. She also delves into the identity creation process by focusing on the rise of Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). According to her, AfD policies, statements and political movements were completely matched with three spheres; firstly, the German identity and Germans’ interests, secondly, labeling the refugees as a threat to German identity, as third and the last, AfD claimed

that their solutions and political approaches were only way of salvation for the German nation (Kappenberg, 2019).

In Constructivism, language and definitions play an important role to label who is good and bad. Once a minority or political group defined as “corrupted”, “evil” or “other” by the Populist leader that targeted minority will be under pressure of the idea. According to other leading scholar Onuf (1989) states that all social norms, not simply instructional rules, are inherently and continuously regulative and constitutive. He defines the language as a crucial tool for leaders to set their policies so that speech of the leader makes language performative (Onuf, 1989). Within constructivism, language functioning is considered as essentially social, with speech campaigns not only allowing individuals to interact but also teaching them how to behave in their surroundings.

The complex procedure of creating an identity is an important feature of constructivism in the context of populism. Populist leaders effectively construct, and project identities based on an opposition between "the people" and imagined elites or externalized "others." These identities, far from being fixed, are essentially variable and subject to ongoing social construction, shaped by the shifting outlines of political discourse and other influences.

As an outcome of building an internal identity with the help of a constructivist narrative, populism finds an appealing place in society through identification inside. The constructivist perspective on populism focuses on the ideas given and expressed by populists. The narrative structure of populist ideologies that appeal to specific social groups typically emphasizes anti-establishment sentiment, economic concerns, and patriotic ideas. It is also worth noting that populists would find it easier to charm societies with glorified histories, such as Hungary, Germany, France, Italy, and other contemporary European examples.

Table 2. Constructivist Dimensions and their Relevance to Populism

Constructivist Dimensions	Relevance to Populism
Socially Constructed Reality	Populist leaders manage perceptions by creating opponents and allies based on socially constructed identities, rather than solely on economic or material concerns.
Importance of Identity	Constructivism highlights how identities are shaped through interactions. Populist movements create and project identities based on conflicts between "the people" and perceived elites or "others."
Language and Definitions	Populism often involves labeling certain groups as "corrupted," "evil," or "other." Constructivism emphasizes that language plays a crucial role in establishing norms, creating identities, and shaping political narratives.
Ideas on Security	Constructivism's focus on ideational elements helps to understand how populist leaders frame national identity, cultural values, and perceived threats. This framing is crucial for resonating with specific groups.
Social Interaction and Norms	Populism uses constructed identities to label what is "good" or "bad", this helps to shape political discourse and community norms. Constructivism helps explain how these identities and narratives are formed and persist.
Social and Ideational Processes	Constructivism's emphasis on social and ideational processes is crucial for understanding the rise and influence of populism, which actively shapes and is shaped by these processes.

Source: Made by the author.

3. HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE FAR RIGHT AND THE AFD'S CURRENT ROLE IN GERMANY

This chapter investigates the historical and present features of far-right nationalism in Germany, with an emphasis on its evolution and the role of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in today's political scene. The examination begins by tracing the origins of far-right ideologies in Europe, focusing on their growth throughout crucial historical occasions such as nation-state creation and the World Wars. It investigates how these movements have evolved post-World War II, negotiating democratic frameworks while capitalizing on cultural and economic fears. The chapter then shifts to the present day, emphasizing the emergence of populist narratives and the AfD's exploitation of social divides, notably between East and West Germany. By delving into the AfD's history, strategy, and language, the chapter sheds light on the persistence and change of far-right politics in modern Germany.

3.1. Historical Background of Far-right in Europe

The trajectory of European nationalism, particularly in its far-right form, has been shaped by significant transformations and conflicts, with different leaders and movements defining each era. The foundations of modern nationalism can be traced back to the cultural and political developments of the late 18th century, when the notion of the nation-state began to challenge established dynastic systems (Gellner, 1983). In the 19th century, the unification of Italy, led by figures such as Giuseppe Garibaldi, symbolized the romantic nationalism of the time, emphasizing cultural identity and historical territorial claims (Smith, 1998). Concurrently, Otto von Bismarck's application of realpolitik in Germany illustrated a more pragmatic form of nationalism, utilizing war and diplomacy to consolidate the fragmented German states into a unified entity (Craig, 1978).

The period between the world wars, especially after World War I, became a hotbed of nationalist sentiment. The Treaty of Versailles, seen by many in Germany as a national disgrace, created conditions that nurtured radical nationalism, eventually leading to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist movement (Burleigh, 2000). This reflects how nationalism could serve as a force for unity and division. Since the early 20th century, far-right nationalism in Europe has undergone significant changes. Its origins can be traced back to the interwar period, a time marked by economic turmoil and widespread political discontent, which paved the way for the emergence of fascist governments. These regimes, particularly in Italy and Germany, promoted extreme nationalist ideologies, often defined by authoritarian rule, xenophobia, and expansionist ambitions aimed at restoring or enhancing national prestige (Paxton, 2004, p. 70-72). Post-World War II, nationalism in Europe took on new forms. The

Cold War era saw nationalism often as a resistance against Soviet influence, as in Poland, where Solidarity's rise was both nationalist and anti-communist. However, by the late 20th century, nationalism's resurgence in Western Europe often came intertwined with xenophobia, particularly against immigrant communities, seen in France with Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Rally (NR) (formerly National Front - NF) (Mayer, 2013, p. 163).

In the aftermath of World War II, over fascism was discredited due to its connection with the war's atrocities, but nationalism did not vanish. Instead, it resurfaced in different forms. Throughout the latter part of the 20th century, far-right parties adjusted to democratic environments by softening their rhetoric while continuing to advocate nationalist ideologies. Scholars like Betz (1994) discuss how these parties shifted their focus to issues such as immigration, cultural identity, and Euroscepticism, positioning themselves against the backdrop of rising globalization. By the 21st century, the resurgence of far-right nationalism became more pronounced. This was partly fueled by economic crises, like the 2008 financial crash, and subsequent sovereign debt crises in Europe, which led to a surge in populist movements that often incorporated with the nationalist rhetoric. These movements capitalized on anti-establishment sentiments, economic grievances, and fears over cultural shifts due to immigration, as analyzed by Mudde (2007). The manipulation of historical narratives to instill a sense of national pride, often coupled with notions of superiority, has consistently been a key strategy of far-right movements. Memory politics plays an essential role, with historical events being reinterpreted or selectively highlighted to support nationalist objectives (Kallis, 2005). Additionally, gender roles have been intentionally utilized within these movements. Far-right groups frequently promote traditional gender norms, viewing their preservation as critical to safeguarding national identity. This intersection of gender and nationalism is explored by scholars like Valérie Dubslaff (2017), who demonstrate how these ideologies mutually reinforce one another including gender roles within far-right politics. The international dimension of far-right nationalism is significant (p. 168-171). Although these groups prioritize national interests, far-right parties have often aligned with foreign powers or movements that share their anti-globalist perspectives, sometimes compromising national sovereignty in the process, as noted in recent studies on foreign policy alignments (Zulianello, 2020, p. 15). The factors mentioned above illustrate how far-right nationalism in Europe has not only endured but evolved, adapting to contemporary political contexts while frequently drawing on historical narratives to reinforce their legitimacy and appeal.

As the 21st century commenced, far-right nationalism in Europe remained robust, gaining momentum amid globalization and European integration. Parties such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD) have tapped into concerns about cultural erosion and economic instability, reflecting historical

nationalist narratives while addressing modern-day worries (Arzheimer, 2015, p. 545). Similarly, the Brexit movement in the UK, despite its complex nature, was significantly driven by nationalist feelings that prioritized national sovereignty over European unity. This exploration of European nationalism highlights its lasting influence, shaped by historical grievances, cultural identity, and socioeconomic factors. Each phase of nationalism, whether romantic or radical, has profoundly impacted Europe's political and cultural landscape, continuously reshaping the concept of what it means to be "European" in a rapidly evolving world.

To put it simply, far-right nationalism in Europe has shown outstanding persistence and adaptation, perpetually getting in reaction to historical and contemporary events that occur. From its roots in the 18th-century nation-state ideals to its radicalization during the interwar period and resurgence in the 21st century, far-right movements have successfully drawn on cultural identity, economic crises, and fears of globalization. Modern far-right parties have strategically shifted their focus, tapping into nationalist sentiments related to immigration, cultural erosion, and Euroscepticism. This evolution underscores the enduring significance of nationalism in shaping European politics and identity, as it continues to redefine what it means to be European in an increasingly interconnected world.

3.2. Contemporary populist narratives and the AfD in Germany

As many other populist parties in Europe, Germany’s story of right-wing populism is not much different. However, Germany itself has deeper roots of right-wing populism than today’s German nationalist sentiments. Those sentiments have been successfully suppressed by political coalitions and “collective shame or guilt”. Nonetheless, there are many scholars believe that collective guilt can be built only for the first generations and in time especially after third generation the guilt is considered as not the generation’s fault but previous ones, the reason is that many people in Germany also believe that today’s Germany cannot be blamed or responsible for what previous German governments had done before especially in the Third Reich (Dresler-Hawke & Liu, 2006, p. 134).

After purifying the shame and guilt transmitted and structured trough education, culture and the media, populist parties have started to build identities which can be useful and easy to mobilize the political votes. Polarization has been a useful tool to create an identity as it serves to identify who is “us” and who are “the others”. From this point of view, Germany’s east and west experiences play an important role as they were divided for years between under socialist and liberal rule, respectively. The division between east and west is still an issue of the German internal politics which creates an immense gap to fill by right-wing, nationalist and populist parties.

Eastern Germany or previously called the German Democratic Republic (GDR) has a strong support for right-wing populist parties not only today for Alternative for Germany (AfD) but also other political attempts in past such as the German People's Union (DVU) in Brandenburg and National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Weisskircher, 2020). Following the reunification of Germany, strong presence of far-right has been moved from the GDR to western Germany or also officially called as the Federal Republic of Germany. The presence of far-right, even can be mentioned as nationalist-racist, gangs in the country had caused various attacks violently especially targeting migrants or former laborers came from other socialist "sister countries" contracted under the GDR rule. Far-right presence has been gradually increased from small town talks to have big street protests in the capital of Saxony, Dresden. Some protests even gained such support that more than 5,000 supporters have joined them (Weisskircher, 2020, p. 616). For that sense, the group called PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident) was founded in 2014 before the mass mobilization of refugees just after the civil war in Syria. The group has mobilized such a big crowd for their protests that more than 20,000 followers of theirs had been showed up in protests.

As a reaction of all political developments, a social democrat minister from Saxony released a well-received book named "Integrate us First!" and this title reflects a common sentiment she faced from disgruntled eastern citizens, who opposed liberal immigration policies and expressed feelings of being poorly integrated into the broader Federal Republic. This highlights that many in Eastern Germany maintain a distinct identity and feel sidelined relative to their Western counterparts (Weisskircher, 2020, p. 617). That distinction and polarization between liberal west and former socialist east still a political strategy for today's populist parties such as AfD.

The AfD's election campaigns on September 1, 2019, in Brandenburg and Saxony highlight their approach well. They employed symbolic and performative strategies, similar to those used in previous Pegida protests in Dresden. Through slogans like "Der Osten steht auf" (The East stands up), "Wir sind das Volk" (We are the people), and "Vollende die Wende" (Complete the turnaround) the party successfully tapped into the ongoing frustrations of East Germans over perceived injustices and their sense of being left behind post-unification (Lemke, 2020, p. 99).

Populism played a crucial role not only for right-wing but also for the left-wing. The idea of socialism and communism sentiments have not fully swiped out from the society, but it has changed its appearance. Eastern Germans often refer western dominance as "colonialism" as the rhetoric in socialist/communist sentiments. Meanwhile western Germany considered the policies as an integration, eastern part felt it as a colonial and influential rule of the west. Eastern Germans have started to feel as second-class citizens with full of other uncompleted political and economic gaps between the polars.

Having left leaning and socialist economic thoughts, Sahra Wagenknecht established a political party called the "Sarah Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) Reason and Fairness, she stated to journalists that the party intends to position itself as a people's party and aims to participate in its first EU and German federal elections this year (Deutsche Welle, 2024). According to analysis of Deutsche Welle (DW), Wagenknecht's political tendencies center on economic justice and reducing social inequality, advocating for a more equitable distribution of wealth. She often pays attention to the mass media and criticizes mainstream politics for neglecting the working class and support the idea of having a more protectionist economic approach that prioritizes German interests. Wagenknecht's views on migration are notably restrictive, emphasizing the need for effective integration measures while balancing humanitarian concerns. She also expresses skepticism about military support for Ukraine, arguing that it exacerbates tensions. Moreover, her populist ideas aim to resonate with ordinary citizens, positioning her party as a distinctive alternative in the German political landscape. Wagenknecht's party the BSW has become one of the popular parties in eastern Germany along with the AfD, since both using the populist narratives and considered as system challenging.

3.3. Political History of the AfD

As a foundation, like plenty of other populist parties in Europe, the AfD was not a much-known party since many other right wing populist parties have been established before. According to Ulrich, Kramer and Till, the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), in 2013, was established by publicist Konrad Adam, Professor of economics Bernd Lucke, and a journalist Alexander Gauland. The party made its initial parliamentary breakthrough in the 2013 European elections, securing seven seats in the European Parliament (EP). From 2013 to 2017, the AfD succeeded in gaining representation in nearly all state parliaments throughout Germany. Finally, in the 2017 federal elections, the AfD emerged as the third largest political force, securing ninety four seats in the Bundestag (Ulrich et al., 2022). At the very beginning, the AfD was a regular center party differs from others by their economic and financial views. Using the economic tools especially after the 2009 economic crisis, which makes them again a populist party, the AfD and its founder heavily slammed both German and the European Union economic policies. During its early phase, the AfD has placed itself primarily as one of the center-right conservative party, focusing its criticism on the European Union's financial policies following the 2009 debt crisis and advocating for bringing back to use of the Deutsche Mark (DM) which was considered as normal since economists were significantly overrepresented within the party (Ulrich et al., 2022, p. 109). Given that the party's membership primarily consisted of economics professors, their policies were heavily influenced by their professional backgrounds. As extensive debates regarding the future of the Euro were

taking place, the AfD chose to publish its manifesto to articulate its political vision and demonstrate its commitment to addressing critical issues. One of their early manifestos, the party called for Germany to refrain from guaranteeing any foreign sovereign debt, advocated that all Members of the Eurozone should be able to recover their national currencies or enter other currency unions, and any future shifts of German sovereignty should be subject to a referendum (Arzheimer, 2015, p. 541). However, not a long time after, the party was divided into two groups regarding their priorities in German politics. This divide became particularly evident after the party divided into distinctive opinion groups in 2015. First side, on behalf of Frauke Petry, adopted a right-wing and anti-immigration stance, while the second side, led by Bernd Lucke, sought to maintain a focus on Euroscepticism.

According to Fuhrmann (n.d.), as a political party, the AfD found a perfect timing to rise up anti-migration sentiments. Under Angela Merkel's coalition with the Social Democrats, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has shifted further left than it ever has before. The party's temporary alignment with a pro-refugee policy was seen as particularly unforgivable by right-wing supporters amidst the largest immigration surge since the early 1990s. It is unlikely that policies such as deportations will adequately restore confidence among these voters (Fuhrmann, n.d.). The party's interests and the issues it chooses to radicalize are heavily influenced by the emotions and sentiments experienced at the grassroots level across the country. This connection enables the AfD to resonate with voters' immediate concerns and anxieties. Initially, the party's political agenda concentrated on opposing financial and economic policies during the 2009 economic crisis, capitalizing on frustration with how the government has handled the economic slump. However, as circumstances evolved, the party's focus shifted dramatically. After 2015, in the heaviness of the civil war in Syria and the wave of migration that followed, the AfD increasingly adopted an anti-refugee stance. This shift highlights the party's adaptability to political climates and public sentiment. Rather than maintaining a consistent ideological foundation, the AfD's values and policies have been responsive to the issues of the day. This adaptability is a defining characteristic of populist movements, which often thrive on reactionary politics. The evolving nature of the AfD indicates that its policy positions were not predetermined at the time of its establishment but have been molded by contemporary political challenges and concerns.

As such, the party operates as a populist structure grounded in reaction rather than being a stable, long-term, ideologically driven political formation. This reactive nature underscores the party's reliance on current events to gather support, making it less about a cohesive vision for the future and more about addressing immediate fears and grievances within society. By engaging with the emotional base of the public, the AfD effectively positions itself as a voice for those who feel marginalized or neglected by mainstream political discourse.

The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has effectively constructed a populist narrative established around the dichotomy between the "pure" or "true people" and the "corrupt elite" or "evil" labeling the contemporary German and EU leaders as outlined in earlier chapters. This approach not only fosters an identity that opposes "the other" but also offers society a noble cause to rally around. Through this strategy, political leaders forge a connection with the political voters or electorate, legitimizing their rhetoric by asserting that their voices represent the will of the people, rather than merely promoting their personal viewpoints. To fully grasp this interconnectedness, we must delve into the specific speeches of political leaders. The AfD's ability to leverage emotional appeal in its communication strategies reflects a broader trend within populist movements, where leaders often prioritize sentiment over substantive policy discussion (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). This tactic not only simplifies complex issues for voters but also fosters a sense of urgency and collective identity among supporters. For many AfD members and voters, the party's rhetoric resonates on a personal level, validating their feelings of disenfranchisement in a rapidly changing social landscape.

In conclusion, the AfD's evolution from an economically focused Eurosceptic party to an anti-migrant populist party primarily reflects its adaptability to shifted public concerns. The party's ability to tap into and amplify voter frustrations—first with economic policies and later with immigration issues—demonstrates its reactive approach to its politics. By framing itself as the voice of the "true people" against a "corrupt elite," the AfD has effectively positioned itself within Germany as a populist entity responsive to societal anxieties, utilizing emotional appeals to foster loyalty and reinforce a collective identity among its supporters.

4. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OF AFD LEADERS' POPULIST DISCOURSE

In the last chapter, we will utilize discourse analysis to examine and uncover the populist discourses and rhetorical strategies present in statements made by the AfD leaders. After identifying these populist narratives, the first comparative analysis will be conducted, highlighting their common and different rhetorics. In the final part of the chapter, empirical research will be undertaken, employing a comparative data analysis to explore the correlation between the AfD leaders' populist statements and the party's electoral performance. The analysis will focus on the party's rising election results in Germany, specifically in the states of Thuringia, Saxony, and Brandenburg, and at the European level in the European Parliament elections. The goal is to demonstrate a positive correlation between the populist rhetoric of AfD leaders and the party's increasing electoral success.

4.1. Methodology of Discourse Analysis (DA)

Discourse Analysis (DA) have been a popular perspective and methodological tool for scholars especially in the field of social sciences. More specifically, after 1980s scholars have favored this type of analysis rather than narrowing their vision within traditional International Relations (IR) theories. Academics in the field of international relations have been gradually interested in this type of analysis, especially the ones who are tendent to constructivism and critical approaches in the IR.

Before to define discourse analysis (DA), we should also investigate what exactly "discourse" means. Discourse, as a meaning, forms a way of thinking from tangible world into intangible ones. Understanding the world not only as it is but also what it means, how it was and how it will be. In brief, discourse is how we acquire the materials or how materials meant to be acquired. In a wider view, discourse represents the exact and actual meaning but also gives you a chance to take granted from many other common ones. In other words, Holzscheiter (2014) defines it as "the space where human beings make sense of the material world" (p. 144). Having the definition in mind, discourse analysis (DA) goes further and encourage the human mind to think deeper by seeing the reality in different perspectives. As a term, "discourse analysis" was stated first time by a linguist called Zellig Harris in 1952. Harris, according to Kamalu & Osisanwo (2015), described the DA as a method of analyzing associated speeches or texts for analyzing deeper further than the direct meaning of a sentence. Moreover, discourse analysis can also be described by "the use/way of language" as it heavily depends on interpretations. They, Kamalu & Osisanwo (2015), also mention the importance of "Speech Act" which is formulated by Austin and afterwards advanced by Searle. In core, speech act serves as a smooth political prediction for political voters/audience. Speech act theory precisely targets the speaker's audience. It supports the bound between leader and his/her followers. The act also allows leaders to create new political terms might last for years in the political scene. Eroukhmanoff (2017), in her article on securitization, explains the role of the speech act as "it shows that words do not merely describe reality, but constitute reality, which in turn triggers certain responses" (p. 106). The power that comes from labeling a person, political party, society or even a country that you disagree as "other" might last for years, rather than a reality that is discussed and finished. Therefore, the words used by politicians are not just words, but also a "political act" and even considered as a weapon.

Hence, once political leaders describe the realities by using words and certain terms, they not only giving assumptions but also creating a new political path for future. Likewise, many countries legitimize their actions by labeling "the other" as "evil" or dehumanizing them. Some examples of how speech act influences the political arena are; United States used the terms "dove" and "hawk" referring

the dove is pure and liberal world meanwhile the “hawk” is dark and evil socialist bloc (Neumann, 2008, p. 62); another example often used by right-wing populist at some point even racist word “the jungle” to refer refugee camps. By describing those camps as “jungles”, political leaders not only dehumanize the refugees but also label them with deeper negative narratives as “dangerous”, “uncivil” and “the other”.

Until this point, we have been trying to explain why discourse analysis is important for evaluating the political speeches, texts and acts. However, especially in the early days of discourse analysis's popularity, there were several criticisms towards the DA claiming that this type of analysis does not serve testable and checkable outcomes and not rely on empirical sciences. For this reason, Milliken (1999), strongly supported the idea that the DA cannot be considered as a different way of thinking or a methodology than constructivist, structuralist and critical theories. According to her, discourses are produced or re-produced by political units to avoid possible rivalries within the society so that political units are heavily depended on the “common sense” of the society to hold it together and tight (p. 237). After those debates regarding how scientific or not the DA is, many scholars have started to combine quantitative search methods with qualitative search such as the DA. For instance, after revealing the realities behind the political speeches and acts, scholars have tried to analyze them with the certain type of data such as political votes, surveys and official ballot box results. Today, there is no question regarding to the discourse analysis whether it is scientific or not since it has been combined with many other social science tools.

Differently from other scientific methodologies, discourse analysis consistently and repeatedly uses everything language involves such as terms, labels, adjectives, descriptions, alienation, friending, neutralization, indigenization, as well as how we described "us" and "others" in the previous chapters. From this extend, Neumann (2008) explains the discourse analysis (DA) by materializing the definition as “it (discourse analysis) says something about why state Y was considered an enemy in state X” and “how the stuff that the world consists of is ordered, and so how people categorize and think about the world” (p. 62). By formulating the discourse, he endorses and encourages to analyze political activities even deeper either a political speech or an act of war. According to Aydın-Düzgit & Rumelili (2019), Foucault’s wider approach, discourse represents everything what is possible or not. Additionally, discourse also involves identities, red lines/boundaries, what is considered legit or not legit as long as rational or irrational (p. 286). As an example of that today’s European Union defines more or less everything, what is considered as Europe or what is not European. All that knowledge is not directly listed by the EU itself, but we assume and consume the reality from what the EU leaders have been stated. In the current tensions of European perspective, creating new discourses often used by nationalist, anti-migrant or at some point racist formations in Europe. Those formations or even political groups

repeatedly refer historical events to legitimize their definitions or labels, assuming that all terms and conditions are the same as they were long before. For instance, “the fortress” or “the European fortress” is frequently used to describe what is good and need to be protected in Europe against what is bad – referring the refugees.

Overall, discourses and their analysis help us to investigate constructive process of the society. Every individual has an identity, whether it is clear or uncertain, radical or moderate, tolerant or intolerant. All these identities are the product of a process, and this process should be analyzed through the discourse it has been shaped with. We can compare this to a scientist working in a laboratory examining an object down to its atoms. With the help of discourse analysis, we can examine the identity building process and reveal the meanings behind the discourses. Furthermore, the DA reveals the bound between the reality and language. The reason is that the language does not represent and reflect the reality but eagerly shapes it. Discourse analysis is a methodology preferred by most academics of our time because it reveals both critical evaluation and historical facts and how this perception is shaped. Scholars like Said (1978) have shown how Orientalist discourses portrayed the "Orient" as primitive, strange, and inferior to the "Occident" legitimizing colonial dominance. Even today, postcolonial discourse analysis illustrates how such narratives continue to shape global politics, affecting development programs, foreign assistance, and international relations between former colonizers and colonized nations (Said, 1978, p. 230). His well-known "Orientalism" attracted many researchers, influenced the world's worldview, and started to question many realities regarding colonial based knowledge.

Finally, discourse analysis is an approach that goes beyond classic and established thoughts in international relations. It gives a more in-depth knowledge of global politics by investigating how language is used to form realities, identities, and power dynamics. Discourse analysis, whether applied to political speeches, media depictions, or diplomatic contacts, remains a vital tool for both researchers and practitioners. It shows the fundamental patterns that control international relationships, allowing us to challenge and potentially modify the dominant narratives in our world.

Comparative analysis (CA) is an indication for comparing two or more variables, such as different data, narratives, policies, or explanations, in order to uncover similarities and differences. In statistical method, CA generally acknowledges distinct patterns, databases, and contextual pieces that distinguish various narratives, ideologies, or political discourses from one another. Della Porta (2008) describes CA’s statistical method as “mathematical elaboration of empirically relevant data approximates the experimental method by intervening after the data are created” (p. 201). By analyzing how different characters interact with language, we can gain insight about the social and political realities that generate diverse narratives (Della Porta, 2008). In the light of comparative analysis, we will examine and analyze

AfD leaders' speeches and their effects on citizens' voting behaviours, for example, comparing the rising political support of the AfD and leaders' controversial speeches in the certain period of time.

Exploratory Research Design aims to offer a meaning to initially unconsidered arguments. It can accomplish this by allowing the researcher to actively use his or her intellectual instruments to bring up intriguing concerns and offer fresh perspectives on a particular reality. Furthermore, exploratory research can assist in promoting curiosity among researchers and those who read them. Exploratory research suggests understanding people and their cultures and communities by combining the interpretative scopes of the researcher and the researched, as opposed to "applying a ruler to social reality" (Reiter, 2017, p. 144-148).

Table 3. Exploratory Research Design

PHASE 1	
Discourse Analysis	
Start: April 2024	**End:** July 2024
Discourse (Authentic Data) Period: 2013 - 2024	
Research Steps: 1. Theoretical definition of discourse analysis 2. Defining the populist narratives 3. Gathering AfD leaders' statements 4. Analyzing the populist rhetorics	
Criteria for selection: • Controversial statements • Carrying at least one populist narrative • Mass media attraction	
In total, 24 statement examples for discourse analysis are created. 17 dates have been used as data in Phase 3.	

PHASE 2	
Document Analysis	
Start: August 2024	**End:** October 2024
Data Period: 2014, 2019, 2024 Elections	
Research Steps: 1. Identifying contemporary elections 2. Collecting data of official local elections 3. Collecting data of the European Elections	
Criteria for selection: • Recent elections • Eastern federal states • Covering the last three elections	
European Parliament – June 9, 2024. Thuringia and Saxony – September 1, 2024 Brandenburg elections – September 22, 2024	

PHASE 3	
Comparative Analysis	
Start: October 2024	**End:** November 2024
Dates and Election results comparison	
Research Steps: 1. Creating authentic data (dates of statements) 2. Creating timeline points on graphics 3. Creating graphics of election results 4. Comparing the dates of statements and graphic lines of election results	
Results: There is a positive correlation between rising election results (official data) of the AfD and its leaders' populist statements (authentic data).	

4.2. Populist ideas of the AfD Leaders

Given the information and references provided above, it is crucial to directly examine the scandalous, polarized, and populist rhetoric of the AfD leaders and representatives. This analysis will be conducted using the discourse analysis method, focusing on uncovering the deeper meanings behind the statements and examining how they are absorbed by society, rather than solely their political implications. According to the rhetorics of the leaders, populism is investigated under 2 main titles as "Economic Populism" and "Migration based Right-wing Populism". This division helps us to differ how populist rhetoric has been shaped regarding to the struggles the country has been encountered. For instance, we have seen economic populism just after the world economic crisis and the European debt crisis. On the other hand, after the huge refugee flow in 2010s the rhetoric has been changed into Migration based Right-wing Populism. After revealing the leaders' discourses, we will have a comparative perspective relying on the narratives: Nationalism, Anti-migrant, Anti-EU, Anti-Euro, "Us vs Them" and Russai-neutr.

4.2.1. Economic Populism: Eurozone, South and North Europe, Deutsche Mark

Economic populist narratives are often used in the early stage of AfD's establishment. Following the 2008 Financial Crisis or "Great Depression", populist parties has started to focus on economic and financial narratives since they were the most effective tools. Since its establishment, the AfD has always been critical about the European Union and its common policies. AfD's claim in Germany is that Eurozone keeps German economic power under than it deserves and often reminding to have Deutsche Mark back, meanwhile the AfD had been telling southern European governments that the Eurozone was a mechanism used by northern European countries to exploit the south. Bernd Lucke was one of the first leaders who used the economic narrative in Germany.

Bernd Lucke - Anti-Euro & National Currency

For Lucke's academic background please see the Appendix C.

He played an important role since he was one of the first faces of the AfD whose ideas got attraction from right-wing conversative voters. His ideas were interwoven between conservative liberal economy, critics towards European Union monetary policies and the common currency -Euro. Following that, he concentrated and became more vocal about the best subject in which he might have an impact: economics. Perhaps the most important issues that made him heard a lot were the problems he saw in the economy and the discussions on solutions to these problems.

The interview he gave to Business Insider (BI) on March 30, 2013, is important in this respect, because it was very shortly after the AfD's founding date, February 6, 2013. In his interview he made

various controversial statements regarding Germany, European Union and as well as for the Eurozone. According to Boesler's Business Insider (2013) interview:

Table 4. Bernd Lucke's BI Interview

<table>
<tr><td>Journalist (BI):</td><td>"Does Alternative advocate that Germany should leave the euro?"</td><td>Populist Narratives</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Bernd Lucke:</td><td rowspan="4">"No. We are running on a platform to dissolve the euro in a stepwise fashion, on a platform which proposes to reintroduce national currencies, but not by having Germany leave the euro, but rather by making the southern European countries leave the euro first, and then breaking up the remaining euro zone into other smaller currency areas, or into countries which each have their own national currency"</td><td>"dissolve the euro"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"reintroduce national currencies"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"southern European"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"breaking up the remaining euro zone"</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">(Lucke, as cited in Boesler, 2013, March 30)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Made by the author.

The interview has been given directly without any changes. From now on, we will analyze certain discourses their meanings and how they might be conceived by the people/voters. Bernd Lucke's language as a leader and representative of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), was direct, refusal and reshaping. The direct refusal of BI journalist's question and stating instant "*No*" and continuing "*We are running on a platform to dissolve the euro*" show the audience, the party is ready for fundamental change in Germany as well as in the EU. As a new party leader, he shows a political strength and plays a populist card here as other populists by giving simple solutions to complex problems. Later on, he proposes *"to reintroduce national currencies"* which indicates conservative and national narratives. He does not mention about former German Mark (Deutsche Mark) yet he states not Germany leaving the Euro. At this stage, he imposes the idea that those who weaken the euro, referring "*the southern European countries"* should leave the euro rather than Germany leaving the euro. In this respect, it glorifies Germany's leading power and economic capacity in the European economy and gives rhetorical messages to the conservative base. Here, rather than economic concerns, the idea of Germany's superiority over other nations and the exclusion of economically "weaker" states from this league is more dominant. These statements cannot of course be explained without mentioning polarization. Economic issues, just like other social issues, are polarized into "us" and "others", and the position of the right and the powerful, in this case Germany, is seen to be trying to be protected. This of course creates the impression of a conservative and protectionist "real leader" who seems to be working for the benefit of German welfare and for German society or in other words "pure people". Finally, he concludes the question with a gradual breaking up from the Euro and its total abolition.

Table 5. Bernd Lucke's BI Interview 2

Journalist (BI):	*"What are your views toward the European Union?"*	Populist Narratives
Bernd Lucke:	*"We do think that this is the way to save the European Union from a breakup. (…)* *We think that the euro currently splits the European Union into two parts (…) unsuccessful southern part, and a more northern European part, which currently seems to benefit from the misery of the southern European countries, because all of the capital flows back from southern Europe to Germany, and the Netherlands, and other stable countries (…)* *There is the imminent danger of the disintegration of the European Union and of the common market, possibly even with a return to, say, impediments to trade, like a reintroduction of customs duties if those southern European countries are (…) not able to balance their trade by a devaluation of their own currency"*	"*save the European Union from a breakup"* "*unsuccessful southern part"* "*misery of the southern"* "*danger of the disintegration"* "*reintroduction of customs"* *"impediments to trade"*
(Lucke, as cited in Boesler, 2013, March 30)		

Source: Made by the author.

In the second question, we see more about Euroscepticism since the question was directly related with the EU itself. Although the question was very simple, Lucke stated that he did not think that the policies taken would save the European Union from disintegration or a breakup. This showed that the European Union was described as a structure that was close to dissolve or that would disintegrate, even before the negative question was asked. But he also said that they, too, were concerned about the collapse or disintegration of the European Union. This is an indication of a contradiction between the language he used and what he said. Although he expressed his concern about the disintegration of the European Union, he continued his answer by saying that the European Union already has an economic structure divided into two. This dual structure arises from the economic differences between the North and the South, and at the same time fuels the polarization within it. Despite all this polarizing language, he also uses a language that assumes that he is sensitive and good-hearted in protecting the interests of not only the German people but also other nations by expressing that the South, which is relatively poorer or more economically weak, is being exploited by the North, which is more economically developed and more modern. This language actually gives the impression of a leader with human feelings aimed entirely at domestic politics, not at the Southern countries of Italy, Spain or Greece, which are experiencing great economic difficulties. Apart from these dilemmas in his speech, after introducing himself as a good-hearted person who thinks of others, he continues his words as describing the Southern European States

as countries and societies with envious and angry feelings, and because of this envy and anger, he sees them as a great obstacle and tension in the rise of the European Union. After all these statements, he makes statements based on the field he knows best, the economy. In these statements, he talks about the common market of the European Union, the economic imbalances in the Southern European states and the current account deficits of those states. In the economic stage, we see the leader's superior view again, since he is the professional of this field. Because he believes that these southern governments cannot cover their existing deficits, and that they cannot act in any manner regarding the Euro because it is a common currency. This also means that the southern states will be not able to close their present deficits since the Euro cannot be devalued. Hence, he emphasized that southern European states are unable to adapt to European integration as well as to Eurozone.

In his remarks, Lucke seeks to depict himself as both a skilled economist and a good-hearted leader who safeguards the interests of the German people while also preventing the exploitation of other southern nations. In doing so, we can see that he does not only bases his policies on rationality but also considers human feelings. In this way, he wants to demonstrate that he is not one of the political "corrupted elites" who are accused of being greedy, but rather one of the "ordinary people".

4.2.2. Migration based Right-wing Populism: Nationalism, German identity, Anti-system, Anti-establishment, Anti-EU

With the changes in international politics and the status quo, populist narratives have shifted to other crises such as refugees, migration, and European Union regulations. The refugee concern has become a major political issue in European politics, particularly since the Syrian Civil War, and has been the primary populist narrative of the AfD for over a decade. Frauke Petry has shifted AfD's populist narrative from economic based to migration one.

Frauke Petry - Traditional, Conservative & Anti-migrant

For Petry's early life background please see the Appendix D.

Petry revised the anti-European stance of the political party, which arose from economic concerns to anti-immigrant stance with the increasing migration problem after 2015. Therefore, she has an important place in the party's policy change, as she provided a marginal change. What makes her special and differs her from others, the figure of a "mother". At that period, she had 4 children, and she was pregnant for her the 5th baby. Moreover, she is married with Sven Petry who is a pastor with whom she has her four children from, meanwhile having a protestant pastor husband she was giving responses to some questions with mini quotes from the Bible (Schwartz, 2017). Overall, she played a "traditional, conservative, and a caring mother leader" role. From her point of a view, future of the Germany depends

on migration policies rather than, as previously remarked by Bernd Lucke, economy parameters. After her leadership the AfD went too far. The party had begun to openly and unabashedly target certain minorities, identities and religions in their discourse. The slogan that is one of the greatest examples of that is "Islam doesn't belong in Germany" or in German "Der Islam gehoert nicht zu Deutschland" (Gedmin, 2019). Since she meant to change the AfD's populist stance, we will analyze her populist rhetoric not only by her interviews and official statements but also using the AfD's official posters.



Figure 3. AfD party poster of Petry and her son (Spiegel Politik, 2017).

As previously mentioned above, as a leader, Petry portrayed a "traditional and caring mother" of the motherland. As a result of this positioning of the idea, we see Petry and her son held lovingly in her arms in the party posters. This party poster was not only a political indicator of how traditionally protective and conservative a mother she was, but also what kind of future she wanted for her own country. While the first thing that draws our attention on the poster is a mother lovingly embracing her son, we see the second important point in the slogan written in a bold and large font says "Und Was Ist Ihr Grund für Deutschland zu Kämpfen" and "Trau Dich, Deutschland!" which mean "And What Is Your Reason to Fight for Germany" and "Have courage, Germany!", respectively. Unlike the innocent and loving mother in the photo, these slogans written in bold fonts also portray a mother who is ready to fight for her country. At the same time, they emphasize the need for a German society that encourages the country to fight and should be motivated for this. These posters were displayed everywhere from small towns in Germany to big cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt and Hamburg, and partly instilled a pessimism about the future of Germans. The impression was given that the only way out of this pessimism was this political party, the AfD. This tactic was widely used not only in Germany but also in many other countries in Europe, with a pessimistic future and a promising political party portrait. Although it is not clear what

the threat is in the party posters, it has been frequently stated by political party leaders and members that the threat to our future is immigration and immigrants. The real problem is immigrants and their lifestyles that are not compatible with German society. As a result, this threat was countered in the following way: "Islam doesn't belong in Germany" or in German "Der Islam gehoert nicht zu Deutschland" (Gedmin, 2019). In addition to her party posters, Petry also greatly influenced the political atmosphere with her interviews. Such as:

Table 6. Petry's Spiegel Interview

SPIEGEL:	"*The world is globalized and Europe is united, but the AfD is focused on the term "nation." Why?"*	Populist Narratives
Petry:	"*Germany's currency and migration policies are currently destroying European solidarity, and the return to the idea of one's own nation in all European countries is a natural corrective to Brussels centralization. We believe that a healthy patriotism should be natural in Germany. …. We think it's wrong that German politicians are exclusively wrapping themselves in the cloak of guilt"*	"*destroying"*
		"*Brussels centralization"*
		"*healthy patriotism"*
		"*cloak of guilt"*
(Petry, as cited in Beyer & Fleischhauer, 2016, March 30)		

Source: Made by the author.

In this interview, we see that AfD leader Petry continues her party's previous economic policies, which are national currency policies, to a lesser extent, but also criticizes the implemented immigration policies and argues that these immigration policies do not directly destroy Germany but destroy the *"European solidarity"* as well. However, there is a contradiction here because while defending the European unity, she also criticizes the centrality of Brussels. While Petry made political and nationalist comments, she also criticized the historical guilt policies or by her words "*the cloak of guilt"* implemented in Germany, and this criticism was interpreted by other political parties and a certain society in Germany as an attempt to legitimize Germany's horrific Nazi past. Later on, she continues her interview with other statements:

Table 7. Petry's Spiegel Interview 2

SPIEGEL:	*"We are the people" was the slogan of the protests that took place in 1989 in Leipzig. Now the same phrase is frequently chanted at anti-refugee demonstrations. That's a pretty big perversion of that slogan, don't you think?"*	Populist Narratives
Petry:	***:*** *... I don't approve at all of dividing people into first- and second-class citizens, into decent ones and indecent ones, as (Social Democratic Party head) Sigmar Gabriel did when he spoke of (Pegida demonstrators as) a "pack.""*	"*dividing people"*
		"first and second-class citizens"
		"decent and indecent"
(Petry, as cited in Beyer & Fleischhauer, 2016, March 30)		

Source: Made by the author.

In this question, the journalist actually asks why a slogan “We are the people” that completely unites the entire country, and the entire German society has become a slogan of completely divisive and anti-immigrant policies in today's politics. Because 30 years ago, with this slogan, East and West Germany united and formed a Germany based on equal rights and equal citizenship. However, today, the same slogan separates German citizens as migrants and non-migrants. Petry did not make any comments about this separation and distorted the question by saying that the separation was not made by me as a first or second-class citizen, and blamed another leader whose followers genuinely support the AfD. Another scandalous interview with Petry that made a splash was published in Tablet Magazine (TM). As it follows as:

Table 8. Petry's Tablet Magazine Interview

<table>
<tr><td>Journalist (TM):</td><td>“What are immigrants from the Middle East doing here that is wrong?”</td><td>Populist Narratives</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Petry:</td><td rowspan="5">... a Dutch scientist that works with many places, including the German government, and he made a study of I think 9,000 participants all over Europe and asked Muslim immigrants for their views on whether Sharia law or national legislation dominated how they behave toward ethnic and religious minorities. ... They also revealed very little tolerance, for example, of the Jews. I think it was half of them who were basically anti-Semitic. ... Scientists have found that in many ways Islam has not been modernized in any way. It got stuck in the Middle Ages, basically. And society in the Middle Ages looked a lot different than it does today. We have to accept that many of these views do not fit into a democratic context”</td><td>“Muslim immigrants”</td></tr>
<tr><td>“Sharia law”</td></tr>
<tr><td>“Islam has not been modernized”</td></tr>
<tr><td>“society in the Middle Ages”</td></tr>
<tr><td>“do not fit into a democratic context”</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">(Petry, as cited in Schwartz, 2017, February 8)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Made by the author.

The first thing we see in this interview is that Petry draws a sharp and unclear line between “Muslim immigrants” and the “Europe”. Then, with this critical line she draws and states that the Muslim community she mentions are not suitable for democratic Europe. This can be defined as “us” and “the others”, which is completely in line with populist rhetoric. In this example, the "other" is portrayed as an alien cultural force threatening national identity and social cohesiveness. Petry then continues as stating that the Middle East, where these Muslim immigrants has come from, is also *“stuck in the Middle Ages”*. In this way, she has once again renewed that these Muslim immigrants are not a modern and are not compatible with European values and European structure. She provides this disputable generalization not just as her personal view, but also as a scientifically verified fact, citing an experiment of 9000 individuals done by a Dutch scientist. In this way, she provided a scientific basis for both her own ideas and her

polarizing statements. In this respect, what Petry said was not a personal, racist or divisive view, but rather based on scientific facts. More importantly, she implies that the anti-Semitism experienced in Germany today is not the fault of German society but of Muslim immigrants who came to Germany. In this way, she both overshadows the increasing anti-Semitism in Germany through Muslims and at the same time builds a wall in front of Germany's confrontation with its historical realities. When we look at this interview in general, the primary targets are immigrants who are perceived as threats while Muslim immigrants being especially targeted. Of course, as we mentioned above, it is not surprising that this minority is directly targeted. Because Petry's political party leadership and political program are based entirely on showing how much of a threat immigrants and these immigrants pose to German society. This is one of the biggest strategies and communication tools of the political party, AfD.

Björn Höcke - Nationalist, Anti-EU & Anti-migrant

For Höcke's personal background please see the Appendix E. What distinguishes Höcke from other party leaders is that he is the most open and right-wing political party leader today's modern Germany has ever seen. His biggest scandal as a leader is undoubtedly the speech he made in German city, Dresden. So much so that, even though he made it in 2017, this speech is still being talked about in today's German politics. His statements as follows:

Table 9. Höcke's Dresden Speech

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Björn Höcke:</td><td rowspan="6">"They wanted to cut off our roots and with the re-education that began in 1945, they nearly managed"
...
"Until now, our mental state continues to be that of a totally defeated people"
...
"We Germans are the only people in the world that have planted a monument of shame in the heart of their capital"</td><td>Populist Narratives</td></tr>
<tr><td>"cut off our roots"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"re-education ... nearly managed"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"defeated people"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"a monument of shame"</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">(Höcke, as cited in Oltermann, 2017, January 18)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Made by the author.

As a right-wing party leader, the language he uses is more of a belief that the established system has historically been imposed by force by the political power and will of Germany. So much so that he describes this system as follows: He states that the people of Germany are being re-educated and are trying to uproot them, but they are not able to do this. With his words, he portrays himself as a full opponent of the system and a protector of the German people. Then he depicts the German people's mental state as one of full oppression and loss of identity. By defining the German people in this manner,

he establishes himself as the true leader and savior of the nation. After stating how much the German people had been oppressed and left behind in terms of historical consciousness, he stated that German society, as the only society in the world, had built a monument to the Holocaust in Berlin, Germany's heart, which was a source of shame. This demonstrates that, as a political party leader, he is also a historian, and that it is possible to read history differently, meaning that the history being given to us is inaccurate. After all, Höcke challenged the *"memorial political consensus"* which is called *"Geschichtskonsens"* after the following years of the World War 2 (Ulrich et al., 2022, p. 121). Following these words, Höcke was heavily criticized by all political parties, leaders and even by his own party members. However, considering Höcke's popularity, another factor is that his statements brought votes to the AfD. Moreover, to analyze Höcke's sharp political vision, Ulrich et al (2022) provides further insights from his speech in Dresden:

Table 10. Höcke's Dresden Speech 2

Björn Höcke:	*"We Germans have lost our visionary power [Visionskraft]"* ... *"If we want a future [...] we need a vision. But a vision will only come into being if we find ourselves again, if we re-discover ourselves. We have to become ourselves again"* ... *"After WWII, Germans lost their ability to mourn their own victims"* ... *"The air raid on Dresden was a war crime"*	Populist Narratives
		"*lost our visionary power"*
		"*find ourselves again"* "*re-discover ourselves"*
		"*Germans lost (...) their own victims"*
		"*war crime"*
(Höcke, as cited in Ulrich et al., 2022, p. 126)		

Source: Made by the author.

In the light of all these sentences and expressions used, it is seen that the origin, as a leader, he does not only want to shape the future, but also wants to save the German identity and German history that has been shaped until today. His words were viewed as a major demonstrate of courage by his own political base during his speech and even after it, despite the fact that he would face heavy consequences. This strategy provides him the impression of not just a real leader who speaks the truth, but also of a victimized leader who is persecuted and unfairly condemned by the existing system. Moreover, as seen in other populist leaders, he portrays himself as a supreme leader who questions the system, refuses to accept it, and seeks to fix the unfairly formed structure.

He also uses anti-establishment language, stating that Germans who had forgotten their identity or "vision" should "re-discover" themselves. How the Germans lost their lost vision was revealed by the

civilians who died in the air raid in Dresden during World War II. Unlike other AfD party leaders, Höcke has positioned himself to challenge modern German identity, history, and the fundamentals today's Germany. Similar to him, Petry, another AfD leader, opposes migration in contemporary German politics. In reality, this demonstrates that the party is pursuing various populist measures at the same time, with the goal of politically influencing the public. Perhaps Leader Höcke's most distinguishing characteristic is his dedication to express revisionist and until now unchallenged arguments against German political history and modern European politics. At the end of his speech, he tried to give his audience the impression of a leader who spoke the truth without fear. He also added the issue of immigration to his speech, albeit a small one, and expressed that the German identity was not only being destroyed by the established order or system, but was also threatened by the intense immigration that was taking place which also supports the policies of the other AfD leader Petry. Höcke's controversial public speeches attract attention of his targeted audience. One of the other speeches he gave was on German Unity Day, 3 October 2022:

Table 11. Höcke's German Unity Day speech

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Höcke:</td><td rowspan="5">"the German nation is exhibiting pathetic weakness and is being destroyed by mass immigration."
...
"The American government has ordered the German government to commit economic suicide and (German Chancellor Olaf) Scholz and company are executing this order."</td><td>Populist Narratives</td></tr>
<tr><td>"pathetic weakness"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"destroyed by mass immigration"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"commit economic suicide"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"American government has ordered"</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">(Höcke, as cited in Müller, 2022, October 14)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Made by the author.

Björn Höcke's speech was given in front of 8,000 people on October 3, German Unity Day. It seeks to exploit socioeconomic issues, the fact that it is delivered in front of such a big audience heightens the discourse's effect. The populist discourses in Björn Höcke's speech aim to manipulate social-economic concerns and national identity. The phrase "pathetic weakness" emphasizes the weakness of the German nation, and targets immigrants by associating the reason for this weakness with "mass immigration." This creates a sense of threat in the audience and reinforces the sense of coming together. In addition, the phrase "The American government has ordered" implies that Germany is under the control of foreign powers, which paves the way for the development of opposition against the government among the public. The phrase "Commit economic suicide" increases concerns about economic independence, making the audience feel an immediate danger. These discourses strengthen

Höcke's populist strategy and aim to create a sense of unity and solidarity in the audience. Höcke's statements were not limited only in German politics but also includes a strong European criticism as well:

Table 12. Höcke's "EU must die" statement

Höcke:	*"This EU must die so that the true Europe can live"*	Populist Narratives
		"EU must die"
		"true Europe can live"
(Höcke, as cited in Kähler, 2023, July 29)		

Source: Made by the author.

Here, Höcke positions the current European Union as the "other" and contrasts it with the concept of "true Europe." The phrase "This EU must die" portrays the EU as corrupt and does not represent the true will of the people. This discourse defines the EU as a structure that threatens national identities, implying that it is incompatible with the demands of the people. At the same time, with the phrase "so that the true Europe can live," Höcke introduces a populist narrative of liberation. This concept of "true Europe" is presented as a vision of an ideal Europe that reflects national identities, cultural values, and the will of the people. This is combined with the promise of regaining the freedom of the people within a framework that criticizes a supranational structure like the EU as an elitist power that threatens local and national identities. Such discourse allows populist leaders to present their movement as defending the "true interests of the people" and aims to mobilize voters with an anti-EU stance. Immigration, one of the main reasons for Höcke's criticism of the EU, has also increased his political support considerably. One of Höcke's statements regarding immigration policies is as follows:

Table 13. Höcke's "de-Islamising" statement

Höcke:	*"de-Islamising Germany and Europe" is "not directed against freedom of belief rooted in the constitution"*	Populist Narratives
		"de-Islamising Germany and Europe"
		"not directed against freedom"
(Höcke, as cited in BBC, 2020, March 12)		

Source: Made by the author.

Björn Höcke's statement "de-Islamising Germany and Europe" calls for the preservation of the identity of Germany and Europe, while defining Islam as a cultural threat. This discourse creates a perception of security and identity through the "other" with a populist strategy. The statement that follows "not directed against freedom of belief rooted in the constitution" is an attempt to soften this discourse by defending freedoms based on the constitution. Thus, Höcke tries to portray an image that

respects constitutional values while addressing the concerns of the people; this legitimizes the populist discourse.

Alexander Gauland - Nationalist, Anti-Globalist & Russia-neutr

Alexander Gauland, as we have previously stated under the heading Bernd Lucke, is among the founding members of the AfD. He was born in East Germany. What distinguishes Gauland from Frauke Petry, although both are from East Germany, is that he sought asylum in West Germany at the age of 18. For this reason, the reference to "inner refugee" is often made in criticisms of his hostility towards foreigners and immigrants (Bleiker & Brady, 2018). After seeking asylum in West Germany, he began studying political science and law in Marburg which is in West Germany, and completed his doctorate there as well. Among the other leaders we mentioned, he is the oldest, the most conservative and the one with polarization discourses. In his discourse analysis, we will examine his frequently used and scandalous slogans and sentences, as well as the Euroskeptic interview he gave to the Visegrad Post.

Table 14. Gauland's "Junge Alternative" Speech

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Gauland:</td><td rowspan="3">"Hitler and the Nazis are just bird shit in more than 1,000 years of successful German history"</td><td>Populist Narratives</td></tr>
<tr><td>"just bird shit"
"1,000 years"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"successful German history"</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">(Gauland, as cited in Grunau, 2018, August 2)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Made by the author.

When analyzing this speech, knowing where and under what conditions it was made will greatly facilitate the analysis of the language used and its purpose. This speech was made by Gauland during the "Junge Alternative" meeting, which we can also consider as the youth structure of the AfD. Considering that the age group from which the AfD received the most votes was young people, it is clear that the speech had a narrative that directly appealed to nationalist feelings. We repeatedly observe the adoption of a "discursive strategy" to question the system and create the belief that known facts are incorrect (Ulrich et al., 2022, p. 127). The statement represents a populist historical revisionist technique intended to minimize the significance of Germany's Nazi past in order to refocus national identity on a more positive, mythologized narrative. This rhetorical strategy aims to regain pride in German history by appealing to a populist constituency that sees mainstream discourses of guilt over the Holocaust or many other assaults on Germans' national dignity. Thus, as seen in other leaders, he draws a discourse that challenges the system and aims to achieve this challenge by distorting the realities. Of course, Gauland's

controversial and scandalous remarks are not limited to this. Another statement that created a stir was about worldwide known German national player Jerome Boateng:

Table 15. Gauland's statement about Boateng

Gauland:	*"People like him as a football player. But they don't want to have a Boateng as their neighbour"*
(Gualand, as cited in Oltermann, 2016, *May 29*)	

Source: Made by the author.

Considering the family origin of Jerome Boateng, who was born in West Germany, his mother is a West German-born German and his father is a Ghanaian; Gauland's words, which were made about a citizen, Boateng, who was born and raised in Germany, whose mother is German, whose native language is German, and who has brought great success to the German national team, have drawn criticism from both the German society and many political parties. After the incident drew serious criticism, the party leader at that time, Petry (2016, May 29), apologized on behalf of Gauland and then shared the following post on X (formerly Twitter) to show her support for the national football player: *"Jérôme Boateng is a great footballer and rightly part of the German national team. I am looking forward to the Euros. #Neighbours"*[1] (Petry, as cited in Oltermann, 2016, May 29).



Figure 4. Petry's X (formerly Twitter) statement

Petry (X, 2016, May 29), in her post on the X platform, clearly stated that she did not agree with Gauland's words and that the national team player was part of the German people. Because this was a situation that could have caused great damage and blow to the AfD, which was already being considered as racist and subject to serious criticism in the eyes of German people. However, Gauland's controversial remarks are not limited to these. Gauland's other inflammatory statement was about Trump's support for "blocking Muslims from entering the country," or in other words "Trump's Muslim Ban" as we discussed

[1] Translation made by The Guardian.

earlier, something Gauland also highlighted, and the notion was something very similar might happen in Germany. In March 2017, Gauland advocated for a Muslim arrival ban similar to the one President Donald Trump has been attempting to implement in the United States, particularly referring to Germans with migrant backgrounds, he stated that:

Table 16. Gauland's discriminative statement

Gauland:	*"Not everyone who holds a German passport is German"*
(Gauland, as cited in Bleiker & Brady, 2018, June 4)	

Source: Made by the author.

With these words, Gauland not only opposed Germany's current immigration and citizenship laws but also pursued a policy of othering German citizens of immigrant origin who had obtained citizenship. He had clearly attempted to create a serious polarization of debate among German citizens with the discourse of "real German" and "not German". By advocating for a Muslim travel ban, he plays on the populist trope of portraying outsiders as a threat to national identity, mobilizing "the people" to combat these imagined threats. His comment on German passports calls into doubt the reality of citizenship for persons of non-German origins, emphasizes an ethno-nationalist view of the "real people," and promotes the exclusionary conceptions of national belonging that are important to right-wing populism. Another topic that resonated with him as one of the AfD leaders was about anti-elitism sentiment. He described a group of “globalised class” who are in the relations with mainstream media, global companies and corporations, politics and of course the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). He specifically described those who are in one of these positions to local right-wing considered Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung as:

Table 17. Gauland's description of "globalised class"

Gauland:	*“almost exclusively in big cities, speak fluent English, and when they move from Berlin to London or Singapore for jobs, they find similar flats, houses, restaurants, shops and private schools everywhere”*
(Gualand, as cited in Connolly, 2018, October 10)	

Source: Made by the author.

Gauland's portrayal of the "globalized class" is in line with populist narratives that highlight the gap between "the people" and an elite group. He portrays this class of globalized elites as monetarily affluent, culturally foreign, and living in cosmopolitan cities while employed by NGOs, multinational enterprises, and academic institutions. The claim that Gauland is fluent in English and can easily adjust

to global cities like Singapore or London highlights their disengagement from local and national issues. His critique that they are "culturally colorful" and unattached to their country of origin feeds into a nationalist narrative that values tradition and rootedness. This serves, in populist stance, to distance the elite from "the true people," suggesting that the interests of the common citizen, who is more rooted in national identity, are vastly different from those of the global class. The way that Gauland is portrayed feeds to a larger populist narrative that charges global elites with being involved in diversity and globalization, two phenomena that are frequently seen as challenges to national sovereignty and traditional values. In addition to inflaming anti-elite sentiment, this discourse supports appeals by populists to recover national identity, culture, and authority from those who are thought to have betrayed it in favor of global interests. In addition to the topics we have quoted and analyzed, Gauland's approach to Russia is at least as striking as his other words. In an interview at Visagrad Post, Gauland describes the relations between Russia and Germany as pro-Russia:

Table 18. Gauland's vision of Russia

<table>
<tr><td>Visagrad Post:</td><td>“How do you view the German-Russian relationship?”</td><td>Populist Narratives</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Gauland:</td><td rowspan="4">Germany has always done well when it has good relations with Russia.(…) the expansion of NATO in contradiction with the oral agreements that had been agreed with Russia during the negotiations for reunification is a fault. The world order could only be altered with Russia; It was nevertheless modified against Russia and this resulted in the Crimean crisis and the Ukrainian crisis. That is why the old rules of Russian-Prussian politics, namely good relations with Russia as a condition for good coexistence in Europe, retain their value”</td><td>“expansion of NATO”</td></tr>
<tr><td>“only be altered with Russia”</td></tr>
<tr><td>“Russian-Prussian politics”</td></tr>
<tr><td>“condition for good coexistence”</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">(Gauland, as cited in Almássy, 2017, July 7)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Made by the author.

Giving examples from history, in his speech, Gauland refers to historicals facts regarding today’s relations with Russia. He gives a historical perspective that prioritizes Germany's interests over those of its allies meanwhile blaming today’s elites to ebolish those “good relations”. On the contrary, he often refers Russia as an ally by giving historical references. However, he clearly closes his eyes against the reality of the second world war which brought terrifying casualties both the USSR and the Third Reich. By neglecting those realities, he rewrites and revisions his own perspective contradicting the contemporary historical knowledge. Gauland's criticism of NATO expansion and the present global order might be seen as a rejection of Europe's established political consensus, which typically favors a unified front against perceived Russian aggression. This skepticism is typical in populist speech, which frequently opposes established political narratives and frames itself as the voice of the "common people"

opposing elite decisions. By presenting NATO's activities as incompatible with previous accords, Gauland frames himself as a realist who pushes for realistic, national-centric policies. Gauland's moderate approach to Russia is also a common approach among the politicians he has nominated as co-chairs of the party. Tino Chrupalla, nominated co-chair by Gauland, Tino Chrupalla's sympathy and approach to Russia can be exemplified by his following words:

Table 19. Chrupalla's view of sanctions against Russia

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Chrupalla:</td><td rowspan="3">"Let’s get rid of the sanctions!"
…
"the price of gas will return to normal when we buy cheap gas from Russia again."</td><td>Populist Narratives</td></tr>
<tr><td>“get rid of the sanctions”</td></tr>
<tr><td>“we buy cheap gas from Russia again”</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">(Chrupalla, as cited in Wieder, 2022, October 10)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Made by the author.

The phrase “Let’s get rid of the sanctions!” offers a simple and populist solution to economic concerns by calling for the removal of existing sanctions. Such rhetoric simplifies complex international relations issues and aims to gain public support by criticizing the government’s current policies. The phrase "the price of gas will return to normal when we buy cheap gas from Russia again" implies that relations with Russia must be strengthened in order to achieve economic stability. Such rhetoric appeals to the public's daily economic concerns by offering "external solutions" and argues that Germany should re-establish its trade ties with Russia. Chrupalla’s statements influence the public by linking the solution to current economic problems to good relations with foreign powers, a typical example of the tendency of populist leaders to simplify complex issues.

Overall, Alexander Gauland's talks, along with Chrupalla’s supportive statements, and interviews demonstrate fundamental features of populist language, which distinguishes "the people" from suspected elites or outsiders. His proposals for stronger immigration controls, focus on historical links with Russia, and criticism of NATO expansion all indicate a nativist and nationalist ideology that prioritizes the interests of a single national identity. Gauland’s main rhetoric is to foster German pride and political emergency through his statements and presenting migration as an existential problem for Germany. By minimizing the Nazis and blaming the globalization for neglecting the German history and identity. He often gives historical facts from different perspectives and rejects some historical realities. By doing so, he positions himself as a defender of German values against the globalized elite who wants to eliminate the Germans from its roots.

Alice Weidel - Conservative, Anti-EU, Anti-migrant & Anti-Islam

For Weidel's academic and personal background please see the Appendix F.

Weidel, the leading leader of right-wing, conservative and anti-immigration policies in German politics, has a complex personality that is difficult for political scientists to understand due to her diversity. When viewed from the outside with a third eye, it is quite interesting that a life that is completely left-wing looking and stands out with its diversity leads a policy that is polarized, anti-immigrant and quite against diversity. Another detail that distinguishes her from other AfD leaders is that, unlike those who pursue strong populist politics such as Frauke Petry and Alexander Gauland, she was born and raised in West Germany. However, she frequently uses the surpassed minority referring to Eastern Germany. Currently in 2024, Alice Weidel is a well-known AfD leader in the Bundestag (German Federal Parliament). As one of the critical leaders of the AfD, which has a populist tradition, she is a public figure known for her statements that make a loud impact, especially during election periods. Before analyzing her speeches, it would be appropriate to look her previous statements such as:

Table 20. Weidel's statement on "headscarf girls"

Weidel:	*"I can tell you, burkas, headscarf girls, sponsored men with knives and other people good for nothing will not secure our prosperity economic growth and above all the welfare state"*	Populist Narratives
		"headscarf girls"
		"*men with knives"*
		"*good for nothing"*
		"our prosperity"
(Weidel, as cited in Daily Mail, 2018, May 23)		

Source: Made by the author.

After such statement in the parliament, she was condemned and warned by the president of the parliament Wolfgang Schaeuble. President reproachfully criticized her by stating that "In your speech you used the term headscarf girls and other people good for nothing, by doing so you are discriminating against all women wearing a headscarf" (Daily Mail, 2018, May 23). Even after years, Weidel's "headscarf girl" statement is still a referred issue in German politics.

After seeing relevant political support, the AfD became the second largest party in Hesse, in the Frankfurt area, due to the large number of votes, Weidel made the following remarks:

Table 21. Weidel's "we have arrived" statement

Weidel:	*"AfD is no longer an eastern phenomenon, but has become a major all-German party. So we have arrived"*	Populist Narratives
		"eastern phenomenon"
		"a major all-German party"
		"we have arrived"
(Weidel, as cited in Connolly, 2023, October 9)		

Source: Made by the author.

The expression “eastern phenomenon” in Alice Weidel’s explanation emphasizes that the AfD was initially seen as a movement specific to East Germany, while also giving the party a “special identity.” This language uses the deep-rooted support that the AfD has gained in East Germany as a basis and draws attention to the party’s “original” identity by emphasizing its past successes. The expression “become a major all-German party” that follows claims that the AfD has now become a political force throughout Germany. This discourse presents the AfD as the voice of not just a specific region, but of all of Germany. In this way, the party positions itself as a force that is widely accepted and represents national interests. The expression “We have arrived”, on the other hand, conveys a message of victory and success; it creates the perception that the AfD is a political force recognized nationwide. This populist discourse claims to represent not only a political success, but also the will and victory of the people. The use of “we” establishes a bond between the people and the leader, allowing the movement to be seen as a social victory. Weidel's push for political support extends beyond Germany to EU institutions. Weidel's views on the EU are similar to those of other AfD members. Her opposed views about the EU are as follows:

Table 22. Weidel's “Dexit” Plan

Weidel:	*“If a reform isn’t possible, if we fail to rebuild the sovereignty of the EU member states, we should let the people decide, just as Britain did”*	Populist Narratives
		“rebuild the sovereignty”
	“It’s a model for Germany, that one can make a sovereign decision like that”	*“let the people decide”*
		“for Germany… make a sovereign decision”
	“And we could have a referendum on ‘Dexit’ — a German exit from the EU”	*“Dexit - a German exit from the EU”*
(Weidel, as cited in Chazan, 2024, January 22)		

Source: Made by the author

Weidel’s statements are a strong example of far-right populist rhetoric. The phrases “Let the people decide” and “Make a sovereign decision” reflect populists’ emphasis on making the will of the people superior. The discourse “Rebuild the sovereignty” is a strategy to defend national sovereignty against supranational structures like the EU. Furthermore, the call for “Dexit” argues that Germany should leave the EU, using Brexit as an example. These discourses clearly reveal the nationalist, anti-elitist and anti-EU stance of populist parties. Nonetheless, Weidel's views were constrained not only to German politics, but also to other European nations. Marine Le Pen, a well-known French populist politician, was also the center of Weidel's attention during the last elections.

Table 23. Weidel's support for Le Pen

Weidel:	*"I think it's wonderful that Marine Le Pen managed to achieve such a great result. And of course it's also a role model for the AfD."*	Populist Narratives
		"such a great result"
		"a role model for the AfD"
(Weidel, as cited in Delfs, 2024, July 1)		

Source: Made by the author

Alice Weidel's admiration for Marine Le Pen demonstrates the AfD's alignment with the broader populist movement in Europe. Weidel not only praises Le Pen for achieving "such a great result"; she also positions the AfD within a network of populist parties representing "the people" against "elitist" and "established" forces. Her description of Le Pen's success as a "role model" suggests that the AfD wants to follow a similar path and sees this success as an example for its own party. This language suggests that the AfD can gain the support of the broad masses and challenge mainstream political forces that Le Pen sees in her party. This discourse presents the AfD as a movement fighting for national sovereignty and traditional values, while presenting the party as the voice of "unrepresented people". Weidel thus emphasizes that the AfD is seen as part of the "populist resistance" led by Le Pen.

Weidel's statements regarding government has become harsher especially after the huge gain of state elections in Thuringia, Saxony and Brandenburg. On September 1, 2024, elections took place in Thuringia and Saxony, resulting in the AfD formed as the first and second largest parties, respectively. The considerable increase in votes in these three states has led Weidel to engage in more heated government debate. Weidel stated:

Table 24. Weidel's "government" statement after the elections

Weidel:	*"The voters want to see the AfD in the government. We are representing around 30% of voters in both federal states. Without us, a stable government is no longer possible"*	Populist Narratives
		"the AfD in the government"
		"We are representing around 30% of voters"
		"stable government is no longer possible"
(Weidel, as cited in Anadolu Agency, 2024, September 2)		

Source: Made by the author.

Weidel defines the AfD as the "voice of the people" by emphasizing that it represents a large segment of voters, such as "30% of voters." This approach aims to elevate the AfD as a legitimate popular force while portraying other parties as distant from the will of the people. The part of the statement, "Without us, a stable government is no longer possible," presents the AfD as a critical element in the government formation process. With this statement, Weidel introduces the populist "crisis" narrative by

implying that a stable government cannot be formed without the AfD. This language portrays the AfD not only as an opposition party but also as a guarantor of stability, presenting the party to voters as a necessity. The statment positions the AfD as the "party of the people" while portraying the other parties as elites indifferent to the real needs of the people.

Table 25 might be useful for summarizing all of the narratives:

Table 25. Populist Narratives of AfD Leaders

Leaders/Narratives	Nationalism	Anti-migrant	Anti-establishment	Anti-EU	Anti-Euro	"Us vs Them"	Russia-neutr
Bernd Lucke	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Frauke Petry	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Björn Höcke	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Alexander Gauland	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Tino Chrupalla	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Alice Weidel	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

Source: Made by the author.

The table highlights how different leaders within Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD) party align with various populist narratives, focusing on common themes like nationalism, anti-migrant sentiment, and anti-establishment attitudes. Nationalism occurs as the main narrative which we see it in all leader's speeches. Nationalism praises the importance of identity, culture and sovereignty. Furthermore, it provokes the feeling of needing protection from outside forces and gathering support from who feels their identity, culture or sovereignties are under threat. Another important narrative that AfD uses is is anti-migrant sentiment, all leaders, except Bernd Lucke, adopting this stance. Migrants are often presented as outsiders who threaten German identity, culture and economic security; provoking a sense of "us versus them." Anti-establishment sentiment is also prevalent, as leaders like Alexander Gauland, Tino Chrupalla, and Björn Höcke position themselves against political elite who are distant and self-serving. They portray themselves as representatives of "ordinary people," claiming to defend the public against corrupt elites. While most leaders align with this view, Lucke and Frauke Petry are more moderate, indicating some variation within the party. Many AfD leaders, including Lucke, Gauland, and Höcke, adopt a critical stance toward the European Union, viewing it as infringing on national sovereignty. When it comes to attitudes towards European Union, several leaders adopt a critical stance

toward the EU. This anti-EU narrative aligns with broader populist skepticism about supranational organizations, portraying them as forces that infringe upon national sovereignty. Their opposition to the EU and the Euro positions them as defenders of German self-determination, appealing to those who feel that European integration has undermined local control and diluted national priorities. Their anti-EU narrative appeals to those who feel EU policies undermine Germany's local interests. Moreover, some leaders, like Chrupalla and Gauland, show a neutral or sympathetic view toward Russia, diverging from mainstream European politics. This stance appeals to voters skeptical of Western influence or supportive of alternative global alliances. Overall, the table underscores the AfD's reliance on core populist themes that build a sense of unity by framing the party as the defender of German identity and sovereignty against perceived threats, both external and internal.

In summary, the AfD's strategic use of populist narratives to unite supporters around themes of nationalism, anti-migrant sentiment, anti-establishment rhetoric, and Euroscepticism. By focusing on these themes, the party's leaders create a cohesive, defensive identity among their base, presenting themselves as protectors of German values and sovereignty against perceived threats from both internal elites and external forces like the EU and migrants. While there is some ideological variation, especially on topics like Russia neutrality, the shared narratives build a strong, unified image of the AfD as the voice of the "true" German people, standing firm against globalization and elite influence. This approach not only resonates with voters who feel marginalized by modern political and social changes but also strengthens the AfD's position as a distinct populist force within Germany's political landscape.

4.3.Analysis of Contemporary Election Campaigns of the AfD (2023-2024)

Thuringia, in 1 September 2024, has elected far-right party AfD with an immense gain 32,8% which is very first time since the World War II (Şimşek, 2024). However, AfD's victory did not come out of nowhere; there was a massive misinformation campaign behind. AfD's political power comes not only from distorting the facts but also using AI generated photos and videos mainly targeting migrants. According to Alisa Schellenberg, political editor at Die Zeit, AFD's AI-generated ads depict Germans in the same way that Nazi propaganda did: *"blond, with prominent cheekbones, broad chests, and perfect posture. However, these ads contrast this with Middle Eastern-looking men and women depicted in shadows, wearing sweatpants and burkas, dealing drugs, and taking over German streets"* (Schmitz, 2024). Regarding AfD's media approach in the latest elections, ISD (Institute for Strategic Dialogue) has a recent report. According to ISD (2024) AfD's influence and sharing rates on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) had more content between 1 May – 1 September 2024. Moreover, the contents were mostly related with anti-federal sentiments and the Russian war in Ukraine. In addition, the party accounts used

harsh rhetoric against migrants in its election slogans, even though it was unrelated to the recent stabbings in Germany. In Thuringia and Saxony, it was analyzed, The AfD prioritized both internal and foreign problems. Regarding global politics, the war between Russia and Ukraine occupied nearly all of the party's focus. AfD representatives either attacked the federal government for backing Ukraine or propagated the idea that they were "warmongers" (ISD, 2024). It is also important to mention that the AfD's social media campaign, for now, is one of the most succesfull one regarding populist narrative and mobilization. As a result of using social media tools, AfD gets its supports mainly from youngsters. In the 2024 EU elections, 16% of young people voted for the AfD, compared to only 5% in the previous election in 2019, that is also why the AfD often called "TikTok Party" not only it gets support from youth but also having an influence on social media compared to other political parties, as it can be clearly seen in Figure 5 (Pfeifer, 2024).

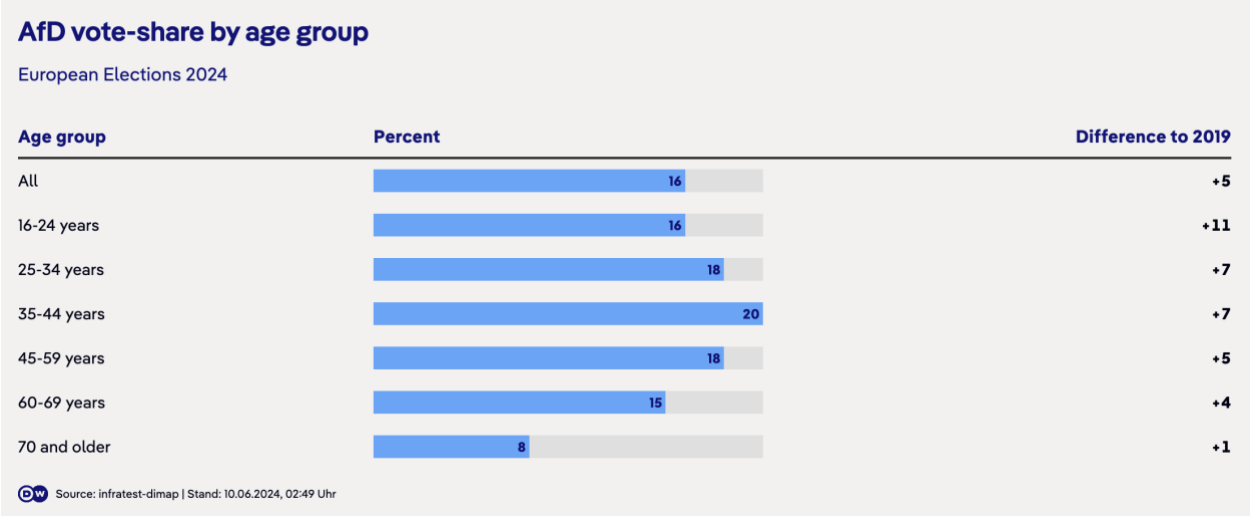


Figure 5. AfD vote-share by age group

After the AfD's recent results in eastern Germany, many Germany citizens with migrant background has been concerned. Dilek Çalı, who lives in Jena/ Thuringia, stressed her concerns to Perspektif (2024) as "it was a result I expected. It's repulsive and scary to know that one in three people I met voted for AfD and has far-right views". Following the AfD's election victory in Saxony and especially in Thuringia, AfD leader Tino Chrupalla stated at a press conference in the capital Berlin, "This blue wave must spread from the east to the west of Germany," while the possible effects of the election results on the general elections to be held in 2025 were also a matter of curiosity (Perspektif, 2024).

4.4. Comparative Analysis of AfD's Votes and the Dates of its Populist Statements

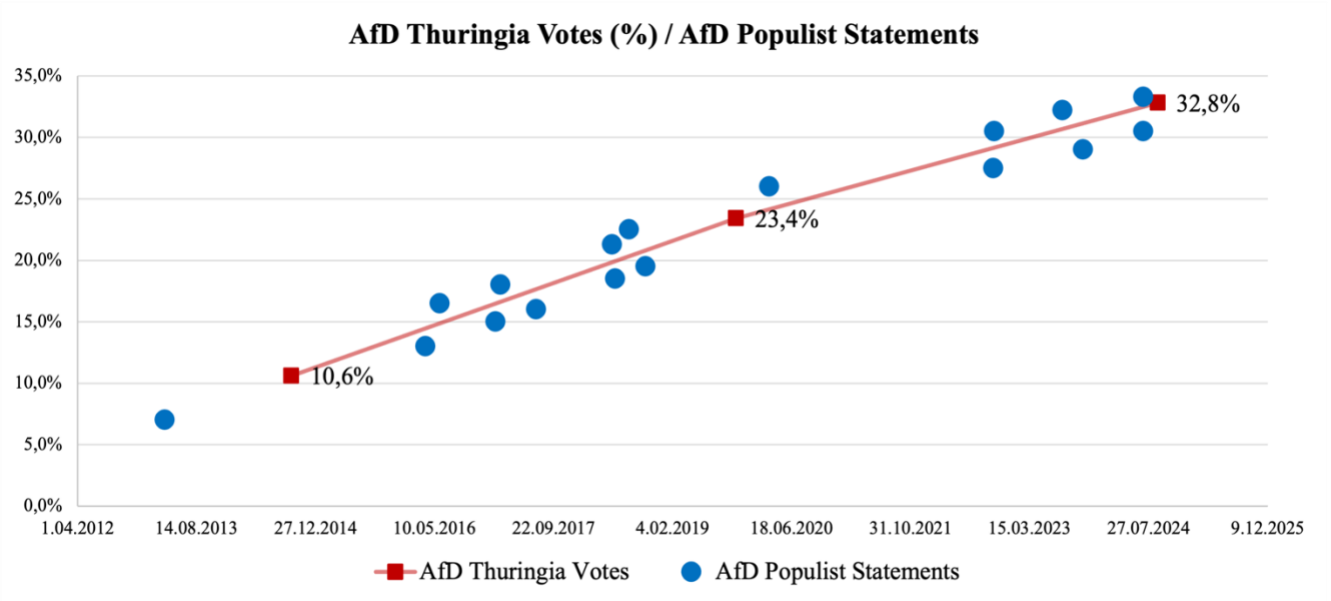
Analyzing the relationship between populist statements and electoral results through graphical data is crucial for understanding the dynamics of political mobilization in Germany. Graphs will reveal the correlation between populist rhetoric and election results. By mapping out this interaction over time, we gain insights into how and when populist leaders align with their voters, helping to identify specific historical or socio-political contexts in which populist narratives are most effective.

Such empirical analysis is particular for studying the rise of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), as it gives an empirical basis for assessing how populism has contributed to the party's electoral success. Through visual graphical data, we can identify patterns that indicate causal relationship between populism and its success and their political revisions. This method enriches our understanding of the AfD's appeal in regions like Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg and even in European level. It also contributes to broader theories on the impact of populism, allowing researchers to compare these findings across different parties and countries. Detailed information about the data of the graphs is given in Appendix G.

4.4.1. Empirical Analysis of the AfD in Thuringia, Saxony and Brandenburg

The reasons for choosing the German federal states of Thuringia, Saxony, and Brandenburg in particular are the Thuringia and Saxony elections were on September 1, 2024, and the Brandenburg election was on September 22, 22024. Evaluating the new results of these states by looking at the past will be valuable both for predicting the future and for analyzing potential political trends within Germany as well as in Europe. In Thuringia correlation between votes and populist statements as it follows:

The case of Thuringia:



Graphic 1. AfD Thuringia Votes and Populist Statements (Made by the author)

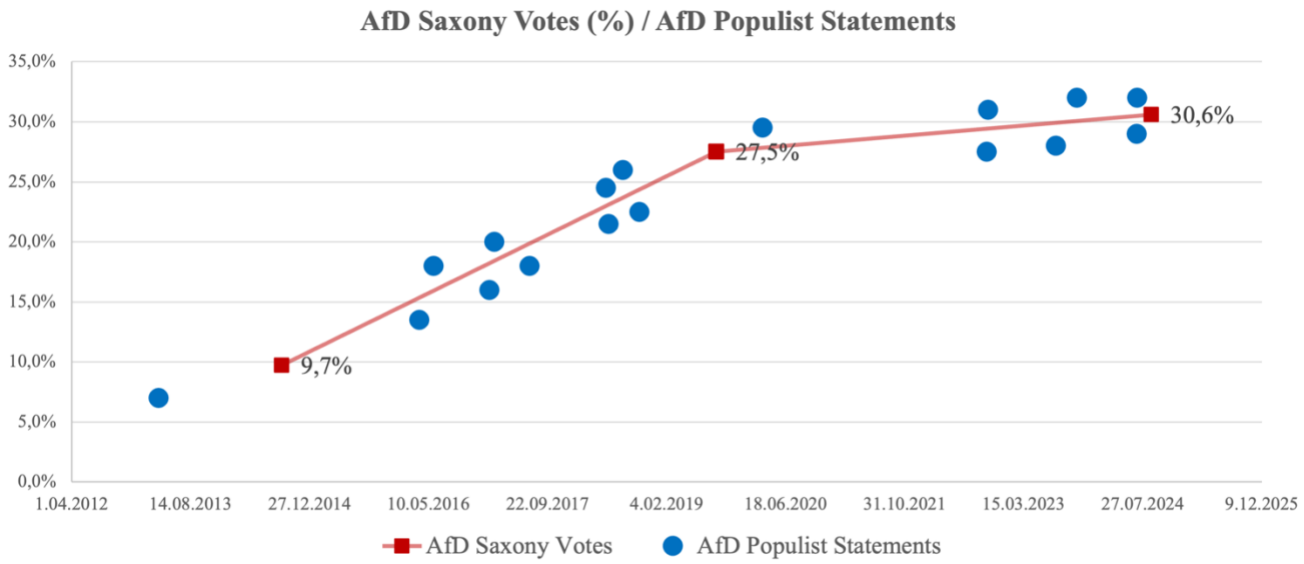
Source: wahlen.thueringen.de

Thuringia was the first "historical success" of a populist party in Germany since the WW2 that is why examining Eastern states of Germany is crucial for populist researchers. The graph shows the link between AfD votes in Thuringia and the frequency of populist statements, which may be mostly affected by Björn Höcke, a notable populist leader within the AfD. The trend shows a steady, positive relationship between the two variables, implying that as populist speech rises, so does AfD support in Thuringia.

Beginning around 2013, the AfD vote share in Thuringia was initially low, around 10.6%. However, over the following years, there was a steady rise, reaching 23.4% by 2019 and eventually 32.8% by in the late quarter of 2024. This increase suggests that populist rhetoric, as symbolized by the blue dots marking populist statements, has significantly contributed to mobilizing voter support in Thuringia, where Höcke's leadership may have amplified populist messaging. The strategic timing and frequency of these statements, clustering around the election periods, imply a targeted approach to boost electoral performance. Notably, the populist statements consistently align with the upward trajectory of AfD's vote share, suggesting their potency in resonating with Thuringian voters. The gradual, steady increase without major dips underscores the sustained appeal of populist narratives in the region. However, while the graph demonstrates the efficacy of such rhetoric, it also raises questions about whether this upward trend can continue indefinitely or if, like in Brandenburg, there could be a plateau if saturation is reached. Overall, the graph highlights how populist rhetoric, likely shaped by figures like Höcke, has bolstered AfD's influence in Thuringia over time.

Another historic “success” of the AfD can be seen in the Saxony elections held on the same date, September 1, 2024. Although it remains the second party in the region, the small difference is a factor that triggers concerns for liberal German citizens. The Christian Democrats and the AfD have a slight difference of 31,9% and 30,6%, respectively (Neu & Pokorny, 2024).

The case of Saxony:



Graphic 2. AfD Saxony Votes and Populist Statements (Made by the author)

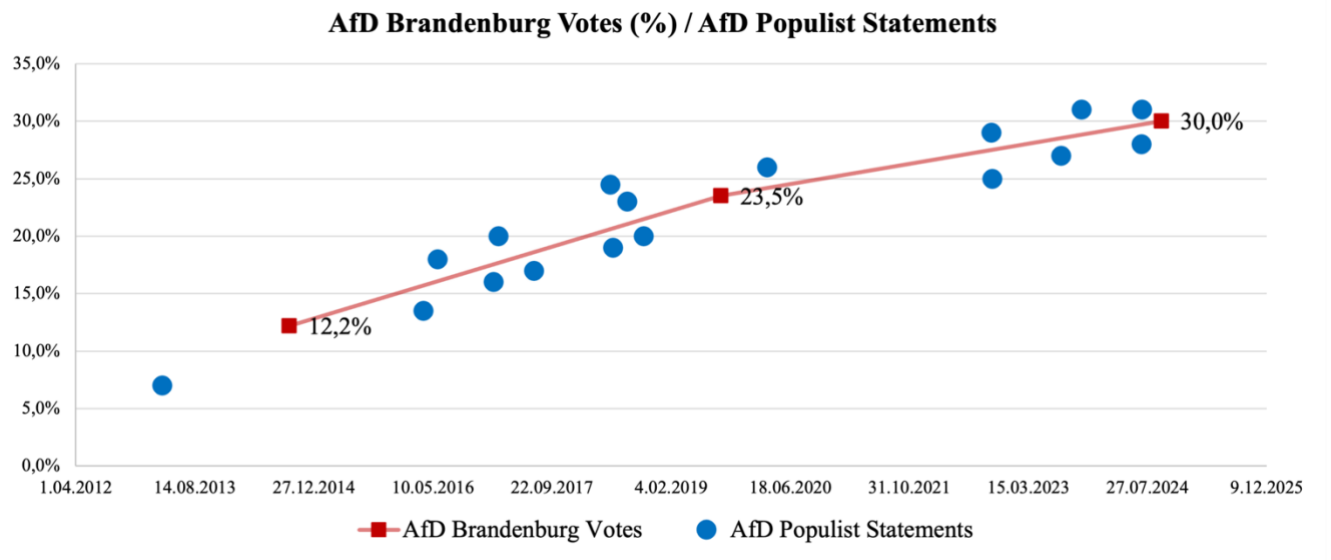
Source: wahlen.sachsen.de

The graph shows the relationship between AfD votes in Saxony and the frequency of populist statements. It reveals a strong, positive correlation between the two factors over time. Starting with an initial AfD vote share of around 9.7% in 2014, the party's support has grown significantly, reaching 27.5% in 2019 and peaking at 30.6% by 2024.

As with Thuringia, the pattern suggests that an increase in populist statements—represented by the blue dots—aligns with periods of rising electoral support for the AfD. This alignment may reflect the effective use of populist rhetoric to appeal to Saxony’s electorate, particularly as statements seem to cluster around key election periods, potentially serving to mobilize voters. The steady rise in both populist statements and AfD votes, especially between 2016 and 2024, suggests that populist messaging has been a sustained and strategic tool for the party in Saxony. However, the graph also hints at a plateau, as the increase in vote share becomes more gradual after 2019, similar to trends observed in Thuringia and Brandenburg. This leveling off may suggest a saturation point where additional populist messaging yields diminishing returns in voter support.

Overall, the graph emphasizes the effectiveness of populist rhetoric in building AfD's influence in Saxony, reflecting the sustained appeal of populism among its electorate while also indicating a possible ceiling for growth.

The case of Brandenburg:



Graphic 3. AfD Brandenburg Votes and Populist Statements (Made by the author)

Source: wahlergebnisse.brandenburg.de

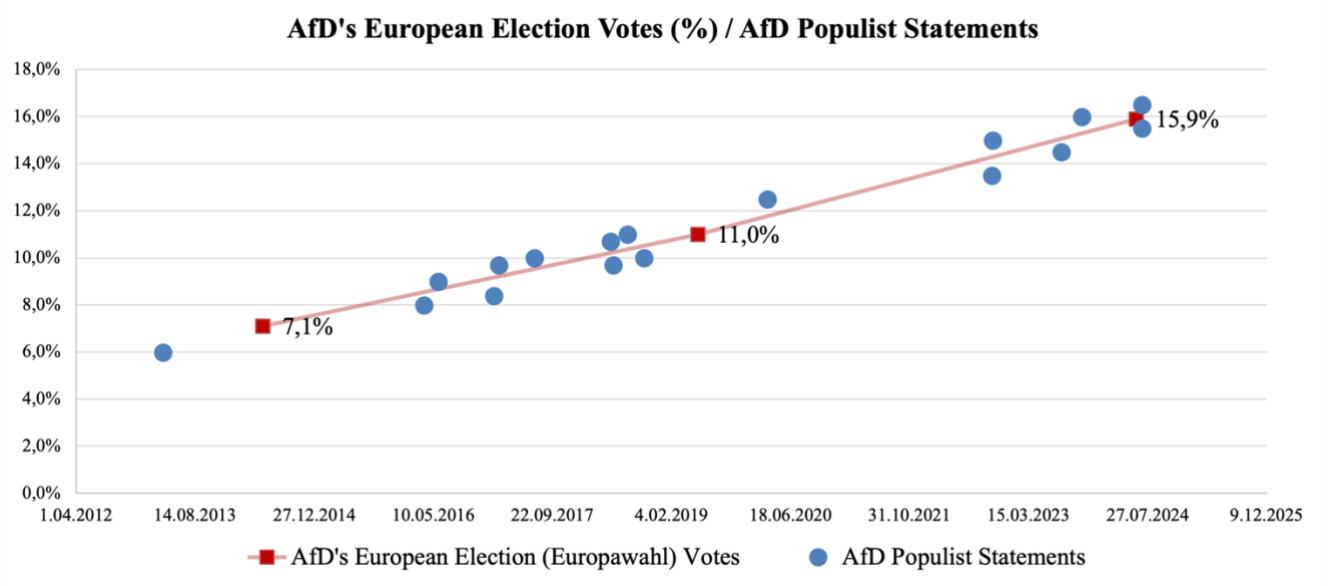
The graph illustrates a strong positive correlation between the percentage of AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) votes in Brandenburg and the frequency of populist statements over time. As populist rhetoric increases, support for the AfD tends to rise. This may play a significant role in shaping voter behavior. Starting from around 2013, the AfD's vote share has grown steadily, moving from below 10% to approximately 30% by 2024. The gradual increase, represented by the red lines and squares, points to a growing base of support for the party. The blue dots represent dates of populist statements aligned with election periods of heightened political engagement. As a result of this outcomes, the AfD may be strategically employing populist rhetoric to mobilize or attract voters. Overall, the graph highlights the influence of populist statements on AfD's electoral "success" in Brandenburg.

4.4.2. European Level Empirical Analysis of the AfD

Analyzing rising populism in Europe is critical for understanding changes in political stability, citizen trust in democratic institutions, and views toward the European Union. Populist movements frequently challenge established norms by supporting nationalist, anti-establishment, and even Euroskeptic viewpoints, which can influence national and EU policy. The AfD in Germany plays an important role in this trend, expressing Euroskeptic and anti-immigrant attitudes that appeal with a

segment of voters. The AfD's strength and rhetoric influence other populist forces throughout the continent, expanding populism's larger impact in Europe. The elections of European Parliament was held on 9 June 2024 in Germany and, as a result, the AfD also has gained a quiet electoral support.

The case of European Elections:



Graphic 4. AfD European Elections and Populist Statements (Made by the author)

Source: bundeswahlleiterin.de

This graphic is essential to analyze the rise of populism in Europe, as it visually captures complex relationships between political rhetoric and electoral support over time. Populism is a dynamic that often leverages anti-establishment, nationalist, and Euroskeptic messages to gain attraction. By mapping the relations in populist statements alongside election results, such graphic reveals how changes in a party's strategy may directly correlate with its electoral success. This allows researchers to empirically examine the impact of populist rhetoric on vote behavior, showing how parties capitalize on specific policies to mobilize their support.

This graphic essentially shows the relationship between the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party's performance in European Parliament elections and the frequency of its populist statements over time. The red squares mark the AfD's percentage of votes in each European election, while the red trend line connecting these squares illustrates the steady increase in the party's electoral success. The blue dots, on the other hand, represent instances or frequencies of populist statements by the AfD, giving insight into the party's intensifying populist rhetoric. By placing both data sets on the same timeline, the graph provides a visual correlation between the AfD's populist messaging and its electoral growth.

In 2014, the AfD's European election vote share was a modest 7.1%. This point, represented by a red square near the start of the timeline, corresponds with a lower number of blue dots, suggesting that populist statements were less prominent in the party's rhetoric at this time. However, as the party's populist statements increased, marked by the growing density of blue dots along the timeline, its vote share also rose, hitting 11.0% in the next European election. This pattern continued, and by the latest election period shown on the graph, the AfD had reached 15.9%, with a high concentration of blue dots indicating a surge in populist rhetoric.

The red trend line connecting the vote shares emphasizes the upward trajectory of the AfD's electoral performance, suggesting a positive correlation between increased populist rhetoric and voter support. Each election cycle, marked by a red square, aligns closely with peaks in populist statements (blue dots) around those periods, showing that as the AfD intensified its populist messaging, voter support increased correspondingly.

This relationship is significant, as it aligns with broader patterns seen in other European populist parties that also deploy Euroskeptic and populist rhetoric to build support. For example, parties like France's National Rally and Italy's Lega similarly use anti-EU messages to attract voters skeptical of the European Union's influence on national sovereignty. In the AfD's case, the alignment of blue dots (populist statements) and red squares (election results) suggests that the party's Euroskeptic and populist segments are critical for German politics and the EU.

This graphic is valuable to understand the rise of populism and Euroskeptic sentiment within Germany and across Europe. By visually displaying the AfD's growth alongside its populist messaging, it provides an empirical basis for analyzing how populist parties can leverage rhetoric to mobilize voters. The AfD's Euroskeptic position, evidenced by the increasing number of populist statements (blue dots), allows it to connect with voters who feel alienated by the EU's policies. This trend is part of a larger phenomenon across Europe, where populist parties have used similar strategies to increase their support, reshaping national politics and challenging the EU's authority.

In the European context, where populist parties often position themselves against the European Union and its policies, these graphs also help to highlight regional and national outcomes of rising populism. For instance, as seen with the AfD in Germany, similar patterns might emerge with other Euroskeptic parties like France's National Rally or Italy's Lega. By comparing these visual trends across countries, scholars can assess whether populist rhetoric consistently drives political support or whether it is shaped by local factors, such as economic instability or migration issues. Ultimately, such graphs provide a clear, data-driven foundation for understanding the growth of populism, helping policymakers

and academics to address its causes and anticipate its future trajectory within the European political landscape.

In sum, blue dots and red lines in this graphic highlight to the AfD's strategic use of populist and Euroskeptic rhetoric to increase their political support. This graphic illustrates the relationship between populist rhetoric and electoral success, showing how populism can be a main shift regarding political attitudes. For scholars, policymakers, and observers, this graphic might provide a clear empirical basis to analyze the dynamics of populism in Germany and Europe, illustrating how populist parties are gathered on EU-related narratives to gain political ground.

CONCLUSION

1. Populism and the IR theory of constructivism have a strong correlation. Populism, as a rhetoric, holds and contains many common grounds for constructivist approach. Populist ideas and constructivist theory both build ideas by excluding and antagonizing opposing points of view. In the long run, this exclusion is utilized to create a new identity while also eliminating opposing viewpoints. This fosters polarization in society in the long term and strengthens the political positions of the parties. Theoretical analysis of populism reveals the main features of populism such as “the people”, “the corrupt elite”, “the common/general will” as well as “the leadership”. Moreover, constructivism helps us to evaluate the relation between political mobilization and identity building which are often used by populist leaders in this research, the AfD. In essence, populist narratives and constructivist identity building give meaning to each other. The analysis of the intertwining relationship between populism and constructivism leads us to have an empirical study of European politics – the European Parliament and German politics in particular.

2. The far right in Germany, like many others in Europe, has grown in momentum since the World Wars and their aftermath. Germany, in particular, as a country defeated in both world wars and separated between East and West, has developed an identity polarized between "liberal" and "socialist" ideals. Although the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Berlin Wall resulted in the unity of German society, the traumas of both world wars, as well as ideological worldviews, remained in people's thoughts and daily practices. These different worldviews today still differ in the reactions given and analyses put forward in the crises encountered both in Germany and Europe. For this reason, in the economic, sociological and political crises that Germany faces, ideological divisions are often encountered on the axis of West and East. The birthplace of the AfD, East Germany, is also a result of this polarization. However, over time, increasingly populist rhetoric has pushed the AfD from its vision of a regional political party to aim for a right-wing party representing all of Germany. Examples of this are particularly evident in Weidel's recent statements. A local populism has spread over the years and become a general German populism.

3. AfD leaders’ statements provide us deeper and precise examination and the rhetorics of the leaders. The narratives such as nationalism, anti-migrant, anti-establishment, anti-EU, anti-Euro, “us versus them” and Russia-neutr help us to categorize the leaders and their policy priorities. Eventually, the priorities set the political statements so that we would consider the speeches as consequences of them.

These narratives, and their evolution over time, have been influenced by political crises and sensitivities in Germany and throughout Europe. As a result, in just a decade, local East German populism has grown into a political base that resonates throughout Germany. The language and communication tools used by the AfD play an essential role in the spread of its political discourse and support. The fact that the majority of their statements are controversial or "scandalous" has enabled AfD leaders to remain on the agenda and be heard by many elements of society. They have gained popularity among young people, particularly through their social media campaigns, and they have received a significant amount of their votes from them. For this reason, the analysis of the populist narratives and discourses they use is important to be aware of. Even though, countries and their priorities/needs are quiet different than each other, the narrative and rhetoric of populism stay the same.

4. The empirical research reveals the overall narratives of populism among AfD political party leaders. The "populist narratives of AfD leaders" and rhetoric expand the AfD political party's vision of its political priorities. What we have clearly seen is that "nationalism", "anti-establishment" and "us vs them" narratives are the common rhetorics among all the leaders. This also demonstrates that, despite the fact that they made statements at different times and about different problems, their narratives and primary points remained the same. The "common enemy" or "the elite", as they have determined, is responsible for all kinds of social, economic, and political crises. We clearly see that their statements have been shaped by not only their sensitivity of "true people" but also their political interests. Having such simple explanations regarding very well complex issues, populists prioritize mostly their political and electoral gains rather than searching for solution based on a common and democratic ground. Polarization of the society creates an opportunity for populists to mobilize their political votes.

5. Comparative analysis of AfD's votes and the dates of its populist statements provided with a strong correlation in both qualitative level and quantitative level. The last AfD election results are important to evaluate since they are crucial for both domestic and international politics. For domestic politics, German federal states of Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg results are vital since they give a vision of internal Germany. Meanwhile, European Parliament election results can be seen as an international level. Providing the comparative data of Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg and European Parliament, enriches our research and supports our defended statements at the beginning of the research. In the case of Thuringia election which is considered the first "political success" of the right-wing party in Germany. The AfD has gained a significant result. Björn Höcke, the AfD chair of Thuringia, has become the first along with his party the AfD in the state. Regarding the case of Saxony election,

considered an important achievement since the AfD has increased its votes more than 20%. Even though, the AfD wasn't the first party in the state, it has become the second biggest party with a slight difference. In Brandenburg, the AfD has become the second biggest party, which shows an immense support from the public, with another slight difference between the SPD and the AfD. In European or international level, the AfD also has achieved a remarkable electoral support in European Parliament elections. The election result was also in favor of the AfD, the party has doubled its vote between 2014 and 2024. Populist movements frequently challenge established norms by supporting nationalist, anti-establishment, and even Euroskeptic viewpoints, which might influence national and EU policies. The AfD in Germany plays an important role in this trend, expressing Euroskeptic and anti-immigrant attitudes that appeal to a certain and growing group of society. Overall, it shows a potential political shift of rising support not only in Germany but also in European/international level.

This research analyzed the discourses of Germany's right-wing populist party, the AfD, while revealing the strong relationship between populism and constructivism theory. The basic characteristics of populism are shaped around the concepts of the people, corrupt elites, general will and leadership. The narratives such as nationalism, anti-immigration, anti-EU and anti-Euro that AfD leaders frequently use in their discourses in the research show how populist leaders develop a discourse in political mobilization and identity building. The electoral successes in Germany's eastern states reflect the potential of populist discourse to expand the voter base. The polarization created by populist movements in society is used as an effective tool in increasing voter support. AfD's rising support in the European Parliament shows that populism has an increasing impact not only at the national but also at the European level. This research has examined the populist discourse of the German political party AfD and offers a deeper analysis from a broader perspective including European politics.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A – International Examples of Populism

Those examples can be listed all over the world from USA to India and from Hungary to Argentina. Examples of populism include a diverse range of parties, movements, and individuals, such as the far-right French Front National, the radical left Syriza in Greece, moderate social democrat Bernie Sanders, as well as democratically elected but liberty-intolerant leaders like Viktor Orbán and Jaroslaw Kaczyński, and authoritarian figures like Vladimir Putin and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (Stengel, MacDonald, Nabers, 2019). Populist parties and their leaders often consider democracy as a direct representation of the people and the purest form of democracy. Additionally, parties prefer the systems based on referendums and direct individual votes over party representation. With this narrative, populist politicians improve the integration of oppressed and excluded groups into politics while also facilitating the manipulation of public opinion in particular areas. The dilemma between increasing the democratic participation and manipulating people has become a useful tool for populism.

Appendix B – European Examples of Populism

As an important example, established in 2009, the European Conservatives and Reformists Group is a center-right political group in the European Parliament, encompasses groups such as of Spain's Vox, Italy's Brothers of Italy, and Poland's Law and Justice - all of whom share the same views on specific EU decisions and Euroscepticism. What those parties have in common is that their political journey began at the domestic level and progressed over time to a larger audience and support on the international level. These political parties, by using the power and legitimacy they receive from local votes, form an international force against globalization and regionalization in the international arena.

Appendix C – Bern Lucke's Biographical Background

Bern Lucke is a professor at the University of Hamburg in the department of economics. He is also one of the founders of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), alongside Gauland and Adam. After losing the AfD's leadership to Frauke Petry in 2015, he left it and founded another political party, with the other former AfD members, called Liberal Conservative Reformers (Liberal-Konservative Reformer) (DBpedia, n.d.).

Appendix D – Petry's Biographical Background

Petry was born in the German Democratic Republic, more commonly known as Eastern Germany. She did well in high school and, like her mother, went on to study chemistry at the University of Reading in

England in the late 1990s. Petry, a PhD holder from the West German University of Göttingen, was pivotal in shifting AfD's concentration from economics to immigration and refugees.

Appendix E – Höcke's Biographical Background

Björn Höcke as a background, he used to be a teacher of history who became possibly Germany's most successful far-right leader since World War II (Dziadosz, 2024). Höcke and Kalbitz were leaders of the far-right "the Wing" (Der Flügel) group, which the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution officially recognized as a suspected right-wing extremist organization. He also chairs AfD Thuringia which he won the state elections, in September 2024, with the "historic victory" as he describes (Stroud, 2024).

Appendix F – Weidel's Biographical Background

As a leader, Alice Weidel may be the most difficult and complex to analyze, among the AfD members we have discussed one by one above. Weidel was also born in Gütersloh, West Germany. Regarding her academic career, she graduated economics and business administration at the University of Bayreuth. Shortly after graduating, Weidel started working at Goldman Sachs Asset Management in Frankfurt, then started working at the Bank of China and has lived in China for over 6 years. Consequently, he is fluent in Mandarin. In addition to speaking Mandarin, another feature that sets her apart from other politicians is that she is married to a Sri Lankan origin woman (Bussa, 2024).

Appendix G – Official Election Results

AfD's official results of Thuringia:

Thüringer Landesamt für Statistik. (n.d.). *Wahlergebnisse für den Thüringer Landtag [Data]*. *Wahlen.thueringen.de.* Retrieved [October 25, 2024], from https://wahlen.thueringen.de/landtagswahlen/lw_wahlergebnisse.asp

AfD's official results of Saxony:

Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen. (n.d.). *Wahlergebnisse der Landtagswahl 2024 [Data]*. *Wahlen.sachsen.de.* Retrieved [October 25, 2024], from https://wahlen.sachsen.de/landtagswahl-2024-wahlergebnisse.php?_cp=

AfD's official results of Brandenburg:

Landeswahlleiter Brandenburg/Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg. (n.d.). *Wahlergebnisse der Landtagswahl 2024* [Data]. *Wahlergebnisse.brandenburg.de.* Retrieved [October, 29, 2024], from https://wahlergebnisse.brandenburg.de/12/500/20240922/landtagswahl_land/ergebnisse.html

AfD's official results of European Elections:

Die Bundeswahlleiterin. (2024, July). *Ergebnisse Früherer Europawahlen. Stand: 12. Juli 2024* [Data]. *Bundeswahlleiterin.de.* Retrieved [October, 25, 2024], from https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/dam/jcr/0872e1f8-935a-45d6-a0f1-a3352fb4bc69/ew_ergebnisse_gesamt.pdf