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Refugee representation in far-right political campaign posters: an analysis

Introduction

Over the past decade, the topic of immigration and refugees has become a politically and socially salient and controversial topic all across Western Europe (Krishna-Hensel, 2018). The cause for this can be traced back to the European refugee crisis that started in 2015 and whose effects continue to shape and affect Western European politics as well as national mediated socio-political discourse (Schmuck, 2017). As a result, a steep overall increase in political actors who make direct reference to immigration in their campaigns can be observed (Freistein and Gadinger, 2020). With this current trend that can be identified in political discourse all across different Western European countries, scholars have argued that such politicisation of immigration and the refugee crisis has caused division and a rise to more extremist political ideologies (Schmuck, 2017), as well as harm to refugees and how they are being represented and pin holed in the media (Baker et al., 2013). More specifically, far-right political parties have been particularly invested in immigration issues and use their public platforms and national campaigns to propagate certain (negative) narratives about refugees, the cultures and countries they come from and how they are impacting the Western European countries they are entering into (Esses et al., 2008). This negative political depiction of refugees can most commonly be observed in far-right campaigns, specifically in public poster campaigns. In this sense, scholars agree that the political poster is a powerful visual tool used to communicate specific political narratives to a large audience (Johnston, 2006; Lirola, 2016). How such posters depict immigration and refugees is of highest importance when it comes to how the voting public of any country perceives and, in turn, interacts with and treats refugees (Müller, 2017). Within the context of Western European countries, it has been found that German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) most commonly thematise refugees in their political and medial discourse (Müller, 2017).

Research question and sub-question

In this scope, and for these reasons, the following study was chosen to be centred around the topic of the refugee crisis and its representation specifically in Austrian and German right-wing political campaign posters. This research and its designed methodology aim to explore and give further insight into the intertwined topics of the European refugee crisis and mediated far-right political communication. More concretely, the focus lies in visually analysing and then comparing German and Austrian right-wing and populist media discourse about refugees and the refugee crisis and how these are being depicted over a specific period of time in far-right political campaign posters. Thematically relevant posters from the Austrian far-right party known as the FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreich) and the German AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) have been selected for this study to be analysed in a qualitative style using a visual narrative analysis approach (Freistein and Gadinger, 2020).

In order to effectively conceptualise and direct the goal of this undertaking, the following research question has been devised:

“How have refugees and the refugee crisis been depicted and represented in Austrian (FPÖ) and German (AfD) far-right political campaign posters between the years 2015-2022 and how do the two parties’ posters compare with one another?”

To explore another potentially significant dimension of analysis, an additional sub-question that looks into how this depiction might have changed over time has also been devised:

“To what extent can an evolution or particular trend/pattern be observed in the depiction of refugees in FPÖ and AfD campaign posters between 2015-2022?”

Social relevance of study

As briefly mentioned above, the depiction of refugees in mediated political content is a topical area of very high contemporary social relevance, especially within the European continent. The European refugee crisis has heavily impacted and influenced Europe’s (and the EU’s) internal structures and politics, causing global debates and discussions that remain relevant long beyond its beginning in 2015

(Schmuck, 2017). In a March 2019 press release titled "The European Agenda on Migration", the European Commission stated that the EU had been faced "with the most severe refugee crisis the world has seen since the Second World War". Moreover, First Vice-President Frans Timmermans developed by explaining that "Europe is no longer experiencing the migration crisis we lived in 2015, but structural problems remain." (European Agenda on Migration, 2019). Hence, the refugee crisis remains a socially relevant topic in day-to-day public discourse and media coverage as it is a still ongoing issue all over Europe.

Furthermore, this topic is particularly relevant in Austria and Germany as both of these German-speaking countries have high numbers, and a long history, of migrants and refugees residing and living in them (Müller, 2017). In light of the 2015 refugee crisis start, the United Nations published an article in September 2015 on their 'UN News' website highlighting the decision made by Austria and Germany to take in thousands of refugees:

As Austria and Germany begin receiving thousands of refugees and migrants who crossed the border last night from Hungary, the United Nations refugee agency hailed the decision as "political leadership based on humanitarian values", while also applauding Austrian and German civil society groups gearing up to assist people as they enter their countries. (UN News, 2015)

This specific event has also been the catalyst in the rise of far-right parties gaining traction and voters in both Germany and Austria (specifically the FPÖ and AfD). Hence, this study design is of high socio-political relevance in both countries that are being investigated, as well as on a global scale in terms of the current management of the refugee crisis that remains an ongoing issue. The aim of this study is to add to the current body of literature on the topic, as well as to provide a deeper insight into how German and Austrian far-right parties may use posters as a highly effective messaging tool and what this means for refugees and how they are being represented in both countries.

Literature Review

The Refugee Crisis and initial effects in Western Europe

Developing on this “unprecedented times” state that is being experienced across the European continent with start of the refugee crisis in 2015, Krishna-Hensel brings together “a collection of media analyses focused on immigration issues to examine how migration has been represented to the public” in her 2018 volume on the topic of migrants, refugees and the media. The European refugee crisis and the grandiosity of the issue are explicitly mentioned by the author: “The massive population influx that is being experienced by Europe exposes a complexity unique to the 21st-century international scene.” (p.2). This framing of the “21st-century”, that brings with it its own new set of challenges, can also be applied as referring to the huge, contemporary shift in media dynamics this century has brought forth. From the emergence of social media platforms to an entirely re-structured news-consumption and news-creation culture, these added complexities should be examined and considered when analysing the discourse surrounding the refugee crisis.

In this vein, mediated political narratives across all European countries regarding refugees, the crisis as a whole and its impact have become front and centre stage in media discourse. Freistein and Gadinger (2020) explain: “During the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, in many European countries, metaphors of never ending streams of migrants became dominant, which evoked feelings of powerlessness, excessive demand, and loss of control.” (p.227) The crisis, its explosive appearance and urgency, as well as its non-stop media portrayal, stirred up feelings of uncertainty and fear amongst the European public and demanded political action and manoeuvring of the situation. This led to a continental rise of right-wing, populist political parties gaining traction and votes: “Increasing migration to Western European countries has fuelled the support for parties such as the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), the French Front National (FN), the Alternative for Germany (AfD) or the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ).” (Schmuck, 2017, p.34). Moreover, a 2017 study conducted by Müller that compared different European countries’ media discourse and active linking between the refugee crisis and Islam as a potential national threat found that “refugees and Islam are much more often discursively linked in German

media.” (p.273). Schmuck (2017) adds to this discussion with a comparative study between immigrants and non-immigrants in Austria and how they each perceive and feel about right-wing, populist campaign posters created and used by the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). Results showed that whilst all participants identified the posters as being “stereotypical and xenophobic” (p.38), the immigrants perceived these as more negative and offensive than the non-immigrant participants. Which, in turn, suggests that “anti-immigrant right-wing populist campaigns may negatively affect the cohabitation of different ethnic groups” (p.8). In these terms, not only does the current political and media discourse surrounding the refugee crisis unsettle citizens of respective European countries, but populist political campaigns that resort to xenophobic and alienating narrative tools stir up tension and mistrust between different ethnic groups co-existing in a specific country.

Building the refugee narrative and image

In populist political narratives, building an image of the targeted group as being “the enemy” is central. Associations are created by this enemy image that link outgroups, in this case it is the refugees, with generalisable, unredeemable qualities such as being “manipulative, opportunistic, evil, immoral, and motivated by self-serving interests” (Esses et al., 2008, p.6). Developing on the usage of such a narrative device, Freistein and Gadinger (2020) state: “A key populist narrative is the imagination of a ‘true body’ of the people that is under threat by external (evil) forces such as the EU, the capitalist system, or migrants, and that needs to be protected by the ‘true people’, who are ignored by their corrupt political elites.” (p.227). This agenda has firmly and successfully taken shape across European news outlets and right-wing political campaigns, with refugee images and representation having become increasingly negative and connotated with “the potential to threaten the host country’s national security and identity.” (Wilmott, 2017, p.67). Wilmott (2017) and Memou (2020) also emphasize the importance of the photographs used in the media to depict refugees. In her study, Wilmott concludes that these are often taken from far away, in an attempt to put the focus on the sheer volume and number of refugees visible and to steer away from showing individual people or faces, which risks to evoke compassion and empathy from viewers. Using images that depict refugees in contact with national police or security forces is also a customary practise: “By

repeatedly presenting refugees with figures of authority, especially those who are supposed to protect the nation and its citizens from outside threats, these newspapers are framing refugees as criminals.” (Wilmott, 2017, p.76). Memou (2020) adds to this by explaining that using a photograph of refugees that is intentionally “depicting a crowd in this way, from a high vantage point, gives rise to connotations of the crowd as 'dangerous' and 'out of control.' ” (p.6).

In the specific case of the 2015 refugee crisis, considering that a majority of refugees who were, and still are, entering European ground are coming from countries such as Syria and Afghanistan (Krishna-Hensel, 2018), religion is a detrimental factor in the discourse. For instance, Müller (2017) highlights that several European right-wing politicians claim “that the challenge to accept refugees is now bigger compared to refugees coming from a country with Christian tradition.” (p.268). Such populist political campaigns urge that ‘Christian morals’ be upheld and protected from the ‘Islamic invaders’, who are deemed as “the culturally inferior ‘other’ to an exclusive ‘European Christian Culture’” (Müller, 2017, p.263). Propagating this ideology furthers the false notion that there are conditions attached to the human right of asylum, such as belonging to a specific religion or culture. An extension of the perceived ‘Muslim threat’ is its “association with jihadist terrorism” (Müller, 2017, p.271), used in mediated narratives to emphasize the security risk that would come as a seemingly natural and unavoidable consequence with taking in refugees (Braun and Roll, 2016). Referring back to Schmuck’s 2017 study, that compares immigrant and non-immigrant opinions on populist rhetoric in Austria, results also revealed that all participants were aware of, and identified, the presence of an “‘us’-versus-‘them’ distinction” being made in the campaign posters they were shown, which is also described as being “inherent of populist political communication style” (p.35).

Dehumanisation of refugees

Intentionally dividing cohabitating ethnic groups and implementing a representation of refugees that reduces them to being labelled as “the others” in mediated and political discourse can also be referred to as ‘dehumanisation’ (Bruneau et al., 2018). Building off of the created (and widespread) narrative of the ‘Muslim intruder who is ignorant to liberal democracy’, Esses et al. (2008) argue that: “several social

psychological theories are consistent with the view that perceptions of other groups as immoral and unjust are important components of the dehumanization of members of these groups and could lead to negative intergroup attitudes and behaviour" (p.6). Furthermore, Gale (2004) dissects how the language used in media to refer to migrants and refugees in Australia contributes to their negative national representation and image. The article specifically "explores the intersection between populist politics and media discourse through analysis of media representations of refugees and asylum seekers." (p.645). In this specific scenario, the paper addresses the term "boat people", that had been used to refer to asylum seekers trying to arrive and seek refuge in Australia in 2001, and how reducing people to a term of the like is used as a tool to dehumanise them (Gale, 2004). Refugees are suddenly not viewed nor identified as just 'people' (aka humans) like everyone else but separated and singled out from the rest of the Australian 'peoples' by labelling them as something other than them - in this case: "boat people" (effectively de-humanising them).

Dehumanisation of refugees is not solely achieved through language used to refer to them, but also through images and photographs chosen to depict them. As mentioned previously, a study by Wilmott (2017) analysing photos of refugees being used in political and medial discourse concluded that "the results of the experiment looking at camera distance again show that photographs dehumanize refugees." (p.74). Additionally, Azevedo et al. (2021) have found that the size of the depicted group of refugees in a photograph is also of high relevance in the context of attempting to dehumanise: "Seeing images of large groups resulted in greater implicit dehumanization compared with images depicting refugees in small groups" (p.1) as this has the effect of visually embodying and promoting popular populist rhetoric such as 'them-versus-us' or 'armies of outsiders invading our country'. Although the use of such photographs is very prominent in most European media representations, this portrayal practise has come under ethical scrutiny among the scholarly body: "Social sciences have suggested that the dominant way of portraying refugees in large groups is inhumane, as it diminishes the perceived vulnerability of the refugees." (Bleiker et al., 2013, as cited in Azevedo et al., 2021, p.2). However, whilst the social sciences thoroughly address and examine the topic of the refugee crisis and acknowledge the impact and influence of visual communication in this

regard, there still is a dearth of research that focuses on conducting visual analysis based studies (Wilmott, 2017).

Impact of political campaign posters

For that reason, the impact of political campaign posters should not be underestimated. Lirola (2016) describes campaign posters used by political parties as “a means through which parties and candidates present themselves to the electorate.” (p.247) in her paper that analysed key political posters of Irish republican party ‘Fianna Fail’ and found that “the poster is a powerful tool used in election campaigns to highlight the power of political parties” (p.245). The author adds to this argument and states that “discourse has an important role in the political process and the political poster can be considered a powerful tool used in election campaigns to persuade the audience” (p.3). Posters can be a particularly effective narration tool in political discourse as they often make it possible to reduce the scope of a party’s agenda (Johnston, 2006), or its general goals, to a single visual that is easier and quicker to process for the audience. “Narratives can take shortcuts to recipients without addressing issues in their full complexity, particularly in their use of imagery and metaphorical language.” (Freistein and Gadinger, 2020, p.224).

Populist rhetoric tied to refugee representation also goes hand in hand with using conservative or traditional images of women as an extended narrative tool in their campaign posters. In this context, women are often used as objects to further the argument at hand, or they are portrayed as a national ‘good’ that is being threatened by the “dark males” coming into the country (Freistein and Gadinger, 2020). Right-wing parties using posters that depict women in traditional folk wear as being particularly vulnerable or at risk of becoming “victims of foreign men” (Freistein and Gadinger, 2020) are no irregularity, but in fact quite prominent. Moreover, delving deeper into Freistein and Gadinger’s comparative study that analyses far-right campaign posters from several countries in Europe, the authors came across, and named, two narratives they predominantly encountered: (1) Honest Men Under Threat and (2) Proud Mothers (p.227). These are put into use to further and effectively propagate the popular right-wing notions of the ‘true, local, hard-working man’ and the ‘selfless mother that instils the true morals in her children’ whose well-

beings are being threatened by the arrival of 'outsiders'. Once more, it is the ability of the audience to identify with these portrayed 'honest country(wo)men' that makes this political communication strategy an efficient one (Freistein and Gadinger, 2020).

The power of mediated political discourse

Müller (2017) highlights the power of mediated political discourse on a public sphere level as he argues that "attitudes towards component parts of the political system such as structures, roles, incumbents of these roles and policies are only in a few cases shaped by direct personal experiences. More often, changes in attitudes towards certain events are influenced by opinions expressed in mediated form." (p.264). Baker et al. (2013) add onto this by emphasizing that this is particularly prevalent and applicable to how attitudes and opinions are most commonly being shaped in regards to the refugee crisis - how refugees are being seen as a people and the Islamic religion as a whole. Going off of this, a very popular depiction in European political discourse of such refugees, is that of a security threat, to which Wilmott (2017) explains that "something becomes a security issue through discursive politics. By articulating something as a security issue, one is also doing something to create this effect." (p.68). This insinuates, that mediated discourse of the kind can be used as an incredibly powerful tool to create and bring into existence narratives that are, up to that point, not solidified, concrete or proven. Wilmott (2017) elaborates that "because the utterances are 'performatives' as opposed to 'constatives,' the statements do not describe reality but construct it, thereby making certain issues visible as threats." (p.68).

Moreover, Freistein and Gadinger (2020) introduce the concept of a 'fantasmatic logic' being used as a tool in popular mediated populist narratives. The authors argue that this logic embeds fantasy into political discourse in an active effort to hide or distract from a political party's true, radical agenda or motive. In other words, this "fantasmatic dimension of storytelling" (p.235) helps to re-imagine or re-package a party's true intents in a watered-down, more desirable and straight-forward manner which garners approving responses from the voting public. The manifestation of this narrative technique "can be produced in metaphors, images, and symbolism" (p.235). This works particularly well in the context of the refugee crisis as this logic

appeals “to a fantasy of purity and unity. [...] One of the main uses of fantasy in plotment is in providing points of identification.” (p.223). This describes and ties into the afore-mentioned ideology of creating an “us versus them” narrative that allows country-men to feel seen, represented and addressed by the strategic use of political discourse that they can identify with.

In this vein, campaign posters that employ visuals such as images, icons, text etc. are used as a powerful form of mediated political discourse that can play a heavy hand in determining a viewer’s perception on a topic such as the refugee crisis. Azevedo et al. (2021) refer to an example of how simply using photographs with specific compositions or elements can already affect and shape viewers’ opinions on the represented topic: “it is not the emotions that viewers attribute to the depicted groups that drive these political consequences, but instead it is the emotions that the viewers themselves experience when looking at these images of large groups.” (p.14). This can be seen as an adequate example that highlights how powerful mediated political communicators (in this case photographs) truly are. Azevedo et al.’s (2021) study continues to explain that after being exposed to these images that depicted refugees in larger groupings, “participants showed increased preference for more dominant and less trustworthy- looking political leaders and supported fewer pro-refugee policies and more anti-refugee policies.” (p.1). Furthermore, effects of such mediums used in populist political campaigns all across Europe are not reserved for country nationals only, but also impact refugees in those countries as they “may lead to higher perceived discrimination, reduced national identity and negative attitudes toward the national majority population.” (Schmuck, 2017, p.38).

Far-right political campaigning

Understanding the power of such populist rhetoric being employed in political campaign posters and the effects and influence this can have on viewers, leads us into the hallmarks and theory of far right political campaigning. In and of itself, campaigning is an essential component in political strategy and marketing and, as Hart (2014) states, is a very effective tool in reaching potential target voters because “campaigns help build solidarity and emotional attachment by providing opportunities for activists to practice movement culture and to develop shared experiences and

memories of collective action.” (p.556). Just like any other form of political campaigning, far-right campaigning employs its own set of popular and widely used methods and characteristics. A very commonly-used and well-known tactic is anti-intellectualism (Hart, 2014). This refers to the strategic act of simplifying and generalising very complex topics (such as the refugee crisis for example) by painting a very black and white narrative (us vs. them) and rejecting more nuanced theories and takes on the subject(s) at hand. Hart (2014) is referring to the U.S. American radical right scene when he explains that “radical Rightists disavowed comprehensive and rational theories in favour of simplistic and convenient explanations and they understood history and political events allegorically, as a struggle between good and evil.” (p.558). Anti-intellectualism also goes hand in hand with what Freistein & Gadinger (2020) have coined as ‘fantasmatic logic’ and which was described above. Most often, the spreading of anti-intellectual narratives is accompanied by, or executed through, fearmongering. Fearmongering is a tactic used to deliberately instigate public panic or fear surrounding a particular topic in exaggerated and polarising ways (Erwin, 2011). Mushaben (2020) showcases this interplay of anti-intellectualism and fearmongering, and its effects, in the context of far-right political parties propagating the narrative of refugees diminishing quality of life for Western Europeans: “they harbour abstract fears of a future decline in their standard of living, leading to demands that the government spend more on their needs than on those of refugees.” (p.17).

Similarly, negative campaigning is another tactic that has been increasing in popularity and use over the past years, especially in far-right political campaigns (Nai, 2020; Walter, 2014). Negative campaigning is a term used to describe a political campaign that focuses on making the candidate’s opponent(s) look bad – it’s a campaign in which a party chooses to not focus on highlighting its own goals or values but instead relies on bashing and/or criticising opposing parties publicly (Walter, 2014). Nai (2020) develops by explaining that “positive campaigning is principally used to attract voters, whereas ‘negative campaigning is used to reduce the support of the opponent.” (p.433). Pinkleton (1997) previously added to this argumentation that along with aiming to reduce votes for rivals, negative campaigning is also resorted to in the hope of reaching and winning over voters who are split or still unsure. When looking at the political stage, Nai (2020) states that the

further a candidate is from the “ideological centre”, the more likely they are to “go negative” (p.434) and that a projected failure in an upcoming election incentivises going negative (p.433). Moreover, studies have deduced that negative political campaigning is more common and likely to happen today than it has previously been (Walter, 2014). The inclination to resort to negative campaigning is not only influenced by a party’s distance from the ‘ideological centre’ but also by its size. Smaller parties rely more on harbouring the public’s attention through more controversial campaigning while larger parties tend to stick to diplomatic discourse: “it seems that smaller parties rather choose a strategic way to adapt to media logics and to get public attention on a short-term scale. In contrast, the bigger parties tend to invest in organizational transformations that promise stable relationships, (a) within parties and (b) between parties and the media/public.” (Tenscher, 2013, p.252).

Methodology

For this study aim, a qualitative research approach applies most effectively and was therefore used. More specifically, a visual narrative analysis, which is a form of content analysis, has been employed. To put this into the research context of this study, this means that a visual narrative analysis of Austria’s Freedom Party’s (FPÖ) and Germany’s Alternative Party’s (AfD) campaign posters has been conducted in order to identify central and recurring themes both parties resort to in their campaigning and messaging around the topic of refugees. The range of campaign posters analysed spans from the beginning of the 2015 refugee crisis until present day: 2015 – 2022. The further aim of using this visual analysis methodology is to be able to directly compare the two parties’ chosen messaging by identifying similarities and differences in the layouts, texts, visuals and narratives presented in their posters that are centred around the depiction of refugees and the refugee crisis. This will therefore also encompass an analysis of the extent to which refugee crisis discourse as a political narrative tool is present, or mentioned at all, in the respective parties’ campaign posters in the first place.

The methodological framework for this study is based on Freistein and Gadinger’s (2020) definition and approach to visual narrative analysis. They refer to it as an

analysis process that can be described as 'layered' as it focuses on analysing individual aspects of a political campaign poster before these are then put together and analysed once more, this time as a whole. For instance, this analysis could be applied to the featured photos, the editing used, the composition of the poster, the text, the metaphors used and the implied double-entendres as well as the larger socio-political context that the poster may be referring to. These separately analysed layers are then pieced together to form yet another layer of interpretation. In the authors' own words, they describe their method as follows:

Our technique can be understood as layered interpretation, that is, as a combination between iconological and narratological approaches. A reconstruction of narratives that starts by contextualising metaphors and images can add layer upon layer of interpretation, since symbolism used in text and images can mean different things in different contexts. (Freistein and Gadinger, 2020, p.226)

Herewith the authors imply that appropriate analysis of each element on a poster is of high relevance and importance when it comes to properly understanding and contextualising the narrative that the ensemble of chosen elements (texts, visuals, layout etc.) is trying to communicate.

Moreover, Freistein and Gadinger's process also addresses the importance of contextualising the objects of analysis within their bigger national (and international) political picture in order to efficiently be able to deduct findings from this multi-layered analysis approach. The authors develop on this by explaining that "narratives can take shortcuts to recipients without addressing issues in their full complexity, particularly in their use of imagery and metaphorical language. Therefore, a visual narrative approach needs to consider both the object of study, that is, images and text, and the explicit as well as implicit linkages to a larger political story." (p.224). Freistein and Gadinger's visual narrative analysis approach also makes an appeal to researchers to consider "how they are configured within the narrative, connected to moral judgements, and related to distinct characterisation of political actors." (p.225). In an effort to avoid bias and strive for objectivity during the methodological process, this element of the analysis approach has also been taken into consideration and carefully evaluated within the context of this study (see "Ethical standards" and "Limitations" sections for more).

A brief example of a layered visual narrative analysis of a 2016 FPÖ online campaign poster is presented below, in order to give a better insight into how the study and analysis process was conducted:



Fig. 1 – FPÖ Graz 2016

When looking at the different elements of this poster, we can identify how each textual and visual part contributes to a specific narrative, both explicitly and implicitly.

- 1) The text at the very top is presented in the biggest font size and reads “FOREIGN in your own HOME”. From the centre top positioning of this text we can assume that it is supposed to be the leading message on the poster. This statement is intended to be read both literally and as a metaphor for the narrative that local nationals are being pushed out of their own country, culture and values and being replaced by foreign invaders who bring aversive ideologies and incompatible cultures with them.
- 2) The textual element in red reinforces the very literal interpretation of the text above it as it reads “municipal housing for Graz locals first!”. This statement also intends to play into the popular populist narrative of refugees/immigrants coming to Western European countries to abuse the social systems in place.

- 3) The graphic is the largest component of the poster and adds very significant context to the poster's messaging and narrative that the textual elements do not directly express by themselves. The illustration very evidently portrays a large crowd of Muslims, who are drawn in traditional and religious attire. The women are presented as wearing burkas, veils and hijabs – all of which are considered as signs of oppression and even terrorism in far-right rhetoric. Additionally, representing the Muslim refugees as intimidatingly large groups also imposes and furthers the narrative of big Muslim families and husbands who have multiple wives and are bringing their 'wrong and primitive' cultural norms to Europe. This in turn, threatens Western European 'Christian values'. The graphic makes it clear that the implications and threats communicated through the textual elements are targeted and directed at Muslim immigrants/refugees coming into Graz. So whilst the text does not explicitly address or state that it is referring to Muslims, the graphic is used as an added "layer" to let the audience deduct and fill in the contextual gap. Lastly, the layout of the graphic is also significant as it shows this large group of foreigners scurrying inside through a door, which aims to give the viewer the feeling that they are watching as their own home is being 'invaded' by threatening outsiders.

- 4) The poster also includes an immediate prompt to action that reads "sign the petition now!". By adding this, it also offers a tangible solution to the threatening narrative the poster is intended to convey through its combination of visual and textual messaging. In other words, the poster's design effectively aims to instigate fear through the poster's visual and textual narrative to fearmonger people into signing the linked petition.

As this example demonstrates, a visual narrative analysis is a very effective method in interpreting the different 'layers' that make up a campaign poster and how these play into each other to build up the desired narrative/messaging as an ensemble.

To summarise: the visual narrative analysis method (modelled after Freistein and Gadinger, 2020) has been chosen as it takes into account images, photographs and

icons used as well as text, language and metaphors employed in each poster. The goal was to create a comparative analysis of the two right-wing parties that focuses on the depiction and evolution (if there is one) of migrant/refugee representation in far-right mediated political discourse and the created narratives that surround it. After having completed the visual and narrative analysis of both parties' campaign posters, central themes and narratives have been identified as well as compared with each other and progressions and patterns of refugee representation presented in the posters have been deducted. Moreover, in order to address the devised sub-question (see above), these identified political narratives have also been analysed on a timeline basis (as well as compared) in order to see whether or not a particular evolution, trend or pattern can be observed throughout the years in how each party depicts refugees in their campaign posters.

Next to the described qualitative analysis assessment and interpretation necessary for this methodology, the numerous relevant campaign posters had to be sourced and verified before analysis could begin. After extensive research and source comparisons, two different selected online archives of political campaign posters (one for Austria and the other for Germany), have been selected and used for this research project. The AfD maintains its own online archive titled "Blaues Parteiarchiv der AfD" on their website that contains all political campaign materials used since the party was founded in 2013; for the purpose of this study I will only be using the campaign posters and disregard other materials such as flyers, videos or information hand-outs. Whilst the FPÖ does not provide public access to any similar type of archive, the most extensive and complete archive of the FPÖ's posters, that is currently available online, can be found on Imago. Imago is a popular online photo archive covering a very wide array of areas and topics and is, for the most part, accessible to the public. The platform describes itself as a "unique archive with exclusive historical photographs and videos from all eras and areas." (Imago, 2023, 'About Us' page). Both these online archives offer an exhaustive and up-to-date collection of the needed parties' political campaign posters published and used over the years 2015 – 2022 (sorted by date) and have been used in the analysis for this thesis study.

It is however important to clearly state, and keep in mind while reading this study and its results, that these archives and their contents cannot be guaranteed to be fully objective and complete. For instance, it could be possible that a political party would want to only present itself from its best side on its own website and therefore chooses to exclude certain campaign posters that may have been particularly controversial and/or been the cause of national media scandals. As for archives that are provided for and by the public; bias and scrupulousness that may have gone into its creation also cannot be checked nor assured. For this reason, cross referencing with other available sources and internet resources has been done in an effort to double check the accuracy and thoroughness of the contents of the two archives and add any additional missing campaign posters to the sample if necessary.

The used sample size for posters analysed differs for the two parties. For the AfD a sample size of 25 posters was used, whilst the FPÖ sample size is 17. This is because, although the AfD is a much younger party (10 years old) compared to the FPÖ (66 years old), the German right-wing party produces more posters on average per campaign than its Austrian counterpart. Specifically in the 2015-2022 timeframe relevant for this research, the FPÖ has released fewer relevant posters, as well as mostly 'single' campaign posters compared to the AfD that has demonstrated the tendency to release posters in 'series' that all have a nearly identical layout and messaging.

Ethical standards

As this is a qualitative study, respective ethical standards and expectations needed to be taken into consideration. An overarching ethical consideration for this research project, is the sensitivity of the topic at hand. The European refugee crisis is a very contemporary and prominent issue that is at the heart of a variety of international and national debates and discussions (Ann, 2019). Outcomes of refugee politics and its prominence in the media have led to higher tensions and divisions in country populations as polarisation in discourse and media have taken over the topic by storm. This has also led to crimes, terrorist attacks, a multitude of shifts in local ideologies or treatments of certain groups of people etc. For these reasons, the topic at the heart of this study design is a very sensitive one and continuous awareness of

this is required, as this awareness needs to be reflected in how the study has been conducted, analysed and presented (Ann, 2019; Freistein & Gadinger, 2020). This necessary awareness can, for example, refer to being aware of word choice or phrasing in the paper. Throughout this research, especially during the undertaking of the described methodology, it was therefore of highest importance to be, and stay, aware of the choices being made and to state these clearly.

Similarly, within the context of this methodology, it was just as important to strive to work as objectively as possible. In ethical practise, the researcher needs to be aware of their own ideologies, biases, perspectives, background etc. and how these may play into the analysis that is being conducted. Therefore, another ethical standard that has been taken into consideration for this research, is the strive for objectivity and reflection of one's own perspective and how the role of being the researcher may have impacted interpretation. Aiming to state facts and offering an un-biased and transparent interpretation has therefore been given the utmost importance during the process. Adding to this point, Ann (2019) also argues that the inclusion and consideration of opposing, different or varying perspectives to the ones that are originally being presented in a study, is a necessary tool in working towards objective reporting.

Results communication is a further point in ethical considerations that was of high importance. This encompasses not only results but also the respective limitations, delimitations and problems that may have arisen during the study – as these all need to be addressed and explained very clearly. This would mean that the appropriate context needs to be given for the results and to what extent these can be classified as being valid, exhaustive and generalisable. Going off of this, it is of value to touch upon the afore-mentioned ethical aspects of data acquirement and usage in a study design like this one. Accessing and using data found in shared, open databases and archives online is considered an accepted practise in the scholarly field, as Tripathy (2013) states: “if the data is freely available on the Internet, books or other public forum, permission for further use and analysis is implied.” (p.1478). Furthermore, data that was used and analysed in the study should be openly disclosed and, if possible, the sources should be linked, referred to and thoroughly introduced. By doing this, readers have the possibility to access the data themselves and make their

own interpretation of it. This practise actively places transparency and clarity of intent behind the research at the forefront. For this reason, links to access the archives and libraries used for this analysis can be found at the end of the document in the Appendix section.

Results

Identified narratives

After having completed the visual narrative analysis of all 42 campaign posters, the central and recurring themes and narratives found throughout were recorded. As there were multiple narratives that all reoccurringly and regularly appeared throughout many posters of both parties, six umbrella terms for each of these identified narratives were devised. The posters could then be sorted into these six thematic categories according to which of these themes each poster addressed. Campaign posters were not limited to being assigned to one category only, but could be assigned to as many as necessary. The identified umbrella terms are as follows:

1) Women's rights

a very popular narrative in far-right discourse is that Western women and their rights are being threatened by Muslim/Arab/foreign men coming into the countries as refugees. It is spun to depict these men as wanting to strip women of their 'Western' freedoms, impose 'barbaric' Islamic restrictions on them as well as being sexual predators to them (Pepiak, 2019).

2) Safety and crime

Refugees are often presented as national security threats in populist discourse. Far-right parties often play into the idea of refugees starting their own gangs, taking over neighbourhoods where they impose their own 'laws' and opposing local police forces (Braun & Roll, 2016) in their campaigning.

3) Irreconcilable cultural & religious differences

A very prominent theme that could be identified in the analysed posters is the narrative that the cultural and religious ideologies and customs refugees bring with them are just too drastically different from Western European values and way of life. This narrative implies that co-existing is therefore near impossible and that national values are being threatened.

4) Islam as a national threat/enemy

This category has been devised specifically for instances where campaign posters use direct and very clear Islamophobic language/messaging. When Islam is painted as a national (as well as international) threat without any accompanying arguments or examples to explain why and how it poses a threat (Simpson, 2020). Instead, the offered argument is that 'Islam is bad because it is Islam'.

5) Abuse of Western social system(s)

The idea of 'bogus' refugees who flee and seek asylum in Western European countries with the sole purpose of abusing the social systems said country has in place is another popular rhetoric propagated by the far-right (Zimmermann, 2011). The narrative implies that refugees will take everything from the local people and that the latter will, as an outcome, suffer a lower quality of life in their own country.

6) 'Heimatliebe'

Is a German term describing love for one's homeland / national love and pride and is another recurring theme used in the posters that directly addresses the country(wo)men. The goal of employing this narrative is to encourage the local audience to identify with, stand by and defend their country's culture, language, history, religion and values with pride.

All of these themes were devised by analysing the sample of posters and represent popular narratives both parties continuously employed and depicted in their campaign posters centred around refugees between 2015-2022. As will be laid out in more detail in the following paragraphs, some of these themes are much more often used by the AfD whilst others are more relevant to and prominent in the FPÖ posters. Additionally, some of the thematic categories can also heavily bleed into one another in certain posters or, in other words, be difficult to separate from each other or identify one without the other. To provide an example: a poster could either a) directly address an irreconcilable cultural/religious difference (theme 3) as its anti-refugee argument - like a 2017 AfD poster stating that Islam's Halal food culture clashes with Germany's history and love of eating pork - or it could b) address a different theme, like women's rights (theme 1), but at the same time still be referring to theme 3 more implicitly. For instance, another 2017 AfD poster focuses on the

women's rights narrative by 'advocating' for Western women's right to wear bikinis (aka dress freely and as they want) as opposed to wearing burkas as some Muslim women do. By highlighting women's rights by comparing burkas to bikinis, the poster's messaging is also simultaneously insinuating and bringing in the theme of irreconcilable cultural/religious differences. In a case like this one, they go hand in hand and demonstrate what is meant when stating that some posters display themes that are 'bleeding into each other'.

Comparative analysis

When comparing the FPÖ's and the AfD's approaches to refugee representation in their campaign posters, several considerable differences between the two can be identified. Overall, even though the same populist narratives are being used by both parties, their individual choices regarding the poster design, layout and messaging approach are considerably different. When looking at the six narrative categories listed above, clear differences in frequency of use between the two parties can be observed. For the AfD posters, the overall most common narrative employed in the posters is *Irreconcilable cultural & religious differences* (theme 3). Other significant themes used include *Safety & Crime* (theme 2), *Women's rights* (theme 1) and *Islam as the enemy* (theme 4). The *'Heimatliebe'* (theme 6) and *Abuse of social system* (theme 5) narratives were not as prominent and/or frequently resorted to. For the FPÖ's posters however, *'Heimatliebe'* (theme 6) is one of the overall most common themes seen in posters along with *Islam as the enemy* (theme 4). Second to these two narratives is *Safety & Crime* (theme 2). *Women's rights* (theme 1) and *Abuse of social system* (theme 5) were minimally present narratives whilst the AfD's strongest theme - *Irreconcilable cultural & religious differences* (theme 3) – could not be identified once in the FPÖ campaign posters. This is where a significant difference between the parties' posters can be observed: contrary to the AfD, The FPÖ does not place any focus on depicting specific and tangible cultural or religious differences between Austrians and Muslim/Arab refugees and instead resorts to the, much simpler, narrative of *Islam as a threat*. So whilst the AfD posters use more specific and targeted messaging to justify their claims such as: "Islam is bad because...(insert a concrete example like the burka as an oppressive tool or the incompatible halal diet)", the FPÖ posters do not aim to justify or explain their claims

by using specific and applicable examples and instead simply stick to “Islam is bad because it is Islam”. Examples of this can be observed below in figure 2 in which the selected FPÖ poster solely plays into the *Islam as the enemy* narrative (theme 4) and figure 4 which shows an AfD poster that makes a direct connection between Arab refugees and their (alleged) effect on Germany’s safety & crime state (theme 2). Moreover, figure 3 also highlights the afore-mentioned ‘Heimatliebe’ narrative, that is one of the most popular narratives presented in the FPÖ’s posters, as it makes a direct appeal to Austrians to stand by and support their ‘homeland in need’. The German text on the poster reads “Stand up for Austria - Your homeland needs you now”. Compared to its German counterpart, the FPÖ overall places a lot more emphasis on making use of such ‘Heimatliebe’ messaging along the lines of “love and protect your country and culture” “your country needs you” than the AfD does in their posters.



Fig. 2 – FPÖ poster from 2017



Fig. 3 – FPÖ poster from 2016



Fig. 4 – AfD poster from 2017



Fig.5 – AfD poster from 2021

Moreover, when comparing the two FPÖ posters (figures 2 & 3) with the two AfD posters (figures 4 & 5), another significant difference between them becomes obvious – the overall layout and poster structure. What is true for figures 2 and 3 is also true for the rest of the FPÖ poster sample: the Austrian far-right party almost exclusively produces posters that feature the current relevant party leaders/politicians. Out of the 17 analysed posters, only three did not feature one of their politician’s faces. The politicians are also always the central theme of their posters and it becomes obvious that the FPÖ heavily invests in, and relies on, the ‘strong leaders’ ideology that is prominent in populist discourse (Hart, 2014). In figure 2 we see Heinz-Christian Strache, very prominent former leader of the FPÖ between

2005 and 2019 and figure 3 shows Norbert Hofer who served as party head from 2019 to 2021 and ran for president in 2016. Both are very well-known and important within the Austrian far-right political scene and are clearly presented as 'strong and trustworthy leaders who will stand by Austrians and their values'. This also links back to the literature on far-right campaigning theory as basing (visual) campaigns solely around a 'strong leader', that is to be trusted unequivocally, facilitates the use and spread of anti-intellectualism as a messaging tool (Hart, 2014).

The AfD however, produces completely different poster layouts that put no focus on presenting their politicians or party leaders as 'the face' of the party. Out of the 25 posters analysed, only two featured a picture of one of their politicians. Instead, nearly all of their posters exclusively use a variety of internet stock photos that are chosen to accompany and portray the specific messaging presented through the textual elements on the posters. Whilst the main feature of the FPÖ posters are their politicians who cosplay as 'strong reliable leaders', the AfD posters' main feature are the copywritten texts that very often have double meanings or communicate their narratives through metaphors or stylistic 'snarky' writing. See figure 5 as an example that includes a German text written with poor, simplified grammar that is supposed to insinuate that its messaging is targeted at refugees/foreigners in the country who speak broken, or limited, German (text reads: "German woman not free game. Understood?"). So whilst the FPÖ places photos of designated spokesmen at the forefront and other extra narrative layers can only be recognized when also reading the accompanying textual elements, the AfD adjusts the visual and photographic elements to fit and add to the narrative messaging that is a) almost exclusively expressed through the texts and b) always at the forefront of their posters. Based on these findings, one could also argue that the FPÖ's campaign poster structure wants the audience to identify with their 'strong leaders', whilst the AfD does not want to place attention on their politicians as much as they want to create posters that feel like they are centred around, and relatable to, the target voters' experience. It could be a possibility that their aim is for the common voter who sees their posters to identify with the narrative presented instead of with a politician. This potential relatability approach propagates the 'for the people' narrative many populist campaigns are based around as well as also playing into the anti-elitist and anti-intellectualist tropes to reel in 'the commoner's' vote (Hart, 2014).

Another very prominent far-right political marketing strategy that can be identified in the FPÖ posters time and time again is negative campaigning (Pinkleton, 1997; Walter, 2014; Nai, 2020). The Austrian party does not limit itself to only featuring faces of its own politicians but also often resorts to visually portraying other national politicians/opponents in their campaign posters that make direct comparisons to other candidates whilst purposefully painting them and their political stances in a bad light. Figure 2 showcases an example of negative campaigning in which Sebastian Kurz, former Chancellor of Austria, is pictured in black and white and is pitted directly against a much bigger, colourised H.C. Strache. The FPÖ designed this poster as a direct attack on Kurz (and his party the ÖVP) and what they claim to be his stance on refugees and Islam in Austria. Therefore the poster effectively plays into negative campaigning in an effort to a) enhance the strong leader discourse and b) highlight the *Islam as a threat* (theme 4) narrative they are trying to communicate in the first place. Interestingly, contrary to the FPÖ, the AfD has not partaken in negative campaigning in the posters relevant for this analysis released between 2015 and 2022. In the sample of 25 posters, there was no direct mention or naming of any other parties or politicians. This further points to the AfD and FPÖ having significantly different approaches to their poster campaigning surrounding the topic of refugees.

As for analysing a potential significant evolution or pattern in the way refugees and specific narratives surrounding the topic were depicted in the posters, no significant trends or a particular evolution could be identified for either party. Take-aways from analysing each party's posters on a timeline basis included:

AfD

For the German party, a particularly big focus on the narrative of *Irreconcilable cultural & religious differences* (theme 3) could be observed in the 2017 posters. Moreover, *Women's rights* (theme 1) and *Safety & Crime* (theme 2) were the only themes that could be identified in posters of every single year between 2015-2022. Overall, the narratives employed and general poster layout/design remained balanced and quite consistent throughout the selected seven years.

FPÖ

As for the FPÖ, *Islam as a threat/enemy* (theme 4) is the most frequently and consistently occurring theme throughout the entirety of the timeline and is present in the party's campaign posters every year between 2015-2022. Additionally, in 2016 the focus was heavily placed on the '*Heimatliebe*' (theme 6) narrative in the campaign posters.

Discussion

All of the findings in the results section above effectively help to answer the research question devised for this study:

“How have refugees and the refugee crisis been depicted and represented in Austrian (FPÖ) and German (AfD) far-right political campaign posters between the years 2015-2022 and how do the two parties' posters compare with one another?”

In a nutshell, the visual narrative analysis has found that the refugee crisis has been represented in both the FPÖ's and the AfD's posters by repeatedly using and playing into 6 key narratives: 1) women's rights, 2) safety and crime, 3) irreconcilable cultural and religious differences, 4) Islam as a national threat, 5) abuse of Western social system(s) and 6) '*Heimatliebe*'. Adding to this, it was also found that although the two parties share the same socio-political ideology, their approaches to how they choose to depict and convey messaging regarding the topic of refugees and the refugee crisis in their posters is significantly different. This ranges from which key narratives are used the most in their visual messaging to how the parties choose to lay out their posters and what design choices they make. Whilst the FPÖ places a lot of focus on portraying *Islam as a threat* (theme 4) and '*Heimatliebe*' (theme 6) as well as picturing their party's leaders in their posters, the AfD's poster strategy revolves mostly around depicting *irreconcilable cultural differences* (theme 3) and using theme relevant stock images to accompany the textual message of their posters.

As for the sub question:

“To what extent can an evolution or particular trend/pattern be observed in the depiction of refugees in FPÖ and AfD campaign posters between 2015-2022?”

We can conclude, based on the findings described above, that although some smaller and rather disjointed observations could be made for both parties, there was no significant evolution or key trend(s) over time that could be observed for both of the samples analysed.

The research design of this study aimed to offer new insights as well as contribute to what Wilmott (2017) described as a current lack of studies that use a visual analysis method approach when researching the topic of the European refugee crisis through a social sciences lens. Additionally, this study is also of relevance because it focuses on analysing and comparing mediated political refugee discourse in Austria and Germany, which is a pertinent topic in German speaking countries' media and politics. This links back to the literature which makes reference to Müller (2017), who states that “refugees and Islam are much more often discursively linked in German media” (p.273) as opposed to other Western European countries.

Moreover, links to the literature and theory on the dehumanisation of refugees in medial formats can also be made and are highly relevant in the context of this study. In the analysed posters, most commonly in the AfD's, those that were depicting refugees often 1) used pictures of larger crowds and 2) blacked out their eyes or entire faces (see figure 4 for an example for which both of these are true). This is in line with Memou (2020) who states that using pictures of refugees that show them from far away and as a big group helps propagate the idea that they should be seen as an ‘out of control threat’ and simultaneously, strips them of their humanity and individuality (as their faces are not visible). Portraying refugees in this way makes it easier for the AfD's and FPÖ's target audience to dehumanise refugees and identify with the far-right messaging of the poster, which is in line with the discussed arguments and theory on dehumanisation that Gale (2004) as well as Bruneau et al. (2018) address. The theme of *women's rights* was also a prominent and reoccurring theme in the sample of AfD posters in which portrayals of women are being used as a messaging tool to further populist rhetoric surrounding refugees (for instance that the Western woman's freedom and safety are at risk or that Muslim refugees bring

with them ideologies that oppress and control women). This observation confirms what Esses et al. (2008) as well as Freistein and Gadinger (2020) describe in their works surrounding how far-right political discourse will often use a simplified and generalised view of women (as well as of Muslim/Arab refugees) as an important narrative device in their campaigning.

Another interesting observation can be made when looking at the newest campaigning posters released by the AfD and the FPÖ in 2023. Whilst the scope of this study is between the years 2015 – 2022, it is also worthy to note that posters revolving around refugees seem to no longer be a primary focus of both parties' current 2023 campaigns. In other words, as other socio-political issues have gained rapid traction and become highly relevant (such as Covid-19, worldwide lockdowns, police brutality, LGBTQ+ rights etc.) a significant decrease in refugee centred posters can currently be observed. This trend can also be tied back to the literature and theory that describes a hallmark of populist discourse being the jumping from one bandwagon onto the next one (that is currently more publicly relevant), fuelled and backed-up by fear-mongering (Erwin, 2011), anti-intellectualism (Hart, 2014) and fantasmatic logic (Freistein and Gadinger, 2020). However, whilst the AfD and FPÖ's posters from 2023 may not directly refer to refugees and are, instead, centred around topics like increasing funding for the police force or ending the 'Kuscheljustiz' (this refers to what can be called a 'lax justice system' in English), one can still read between the lines that such posters could still be indirectly targeting refugees. The argument that the enforcing of stricter legal consequences in the judiciary system is necessary is often discursively linked back to refugees committing heinous crimes and being a security threat to the respective country (Wilmott, 2017; Esses et al., 2008).

Limitations

As this study design is qualitative, several limitations apply. Most notably, a qualitative design cannot offer exhaustive nor generalisable results. This research focuses on a very specific topic analysis that uses a relatively small sample size and can therefore not be applied to anything outside of its specific measures. Additionally, no causal inferences can be deducted from a qualitative analysis either.

Another limitation within these aspects is the sample size. The number of posters being analysed (in total 42) is pre-determined by how many were produced by the two parties in the 7-year time span, and this needs to be kept in mind as performing this exact study but with a larger sample size (aka a longer timeframe) could potentially yield different results in the analysis. An analysis that looked into more years than just 2015-2022, like this study does, could bring to light some more interesting findings and would offer an overall result that is more exhaustive. A larger sample size of posters may also lead to more significant findings in terms of identifiable evolutions, trends and patterns in depiction and narratives used to represent refugees throughout the years.

Furthermore, another important limitation to mention is the fact that only one researcher was involved in the conducting of the analysis. This means that no second researcher who could double-check and contribute to the analysis was part of this process. As previously touched upon, this affects the level of objectivity with which the analysis was conducted as the sole researcher's (subconscious) biases and predispositions go unfiltered and unchecked during the methodological process. Other researchers conducting the exact same visual narrative analysis could be interpreting the results differently. It is therefore important to acknowledge that whilst this study aims for objectivity and transparency, traces and effects of the researcher's own perspective most likely will factor in in one way or another.

As mentioned previously, a further limitation to keep in mind is the non-verifiable completeness and accuracy of the archives used to source the analysed campaign posters. Whilst cross-referencing of sources has been conducted in order to try and get the most complete and factually accurate sample size of posters to analyse, absolute accuracy can still not be guaranteed. This is because the online archives may be incomplete or subjective to whoever created, curated and/or made them available online (for instance the AfD posters were sourced from AfD's webpage directly and may have been presented and/or curated in ways that look advantageous in the party's eyes).

Lastly, specific to this study, an added limitation to consider is the direct comparison of the FPÖ and the AfD in terms of how long they have been active parties in their respective countries. Whilst the FPÖ was founded in Austria in 1956, the AfD was only created in Germany in 2013. This also means that the FPÖ offers up a much longer and extensive history in terms of legacy, campaign posters, party leaders, political discourse etc. whilst the AfD has only turned a decade old in February of 2023. Although the AfD has produced and published a very large number of campaign posters in these last ten years (and especially in the 2015-2022 timeframe relevant for this study), this significant difference in years should be kept in mind when reading this study.

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Appendix

Abstracts

English

Over the past decade, the topic of refugees has become a highly mediated topic in German and Austrian far-right political discourse. The AfD and FPÖ are far-right parties from Germany and Austria, respectively, who have consistently depicted and thematised refugees in their campaign posters. This study aims to analyse and compare how refugees are being represented in the FPÖ's and the AfD's posters released between 2015-2022. To do this, a visual narrative analysis based on Freistein and Gadinger (2020) was chosen and conducted. Results found that refugee depiction in both the FPÖ's and the AfD's posters can be sorted into six recurring, key narratives: 1) women's rights, 2) safety and crime, 3) irreconcilable cultural and religious differences, 4) Islam as a national threat, 5) abuse of Western social system(s) and 6) 'Heimatliebe'. Furthermore, it was also found that although the two parties share the same socio-political ideology, their approaches to how they choose to depict and convey messaging regarding refugees in their posters is

significantly different. Whilst the FPÖ places a lot of focus on portraying Islam as a threat (theme 4) and 'Heimatliebe' (theme 6) as well as picturing their party's leaders in their posters, the AfD's poster strategy revolves around depicting irreconcilable cultural differences (theme 3) and using theme relevant stock images to accompany the textual message of their posters. Subsequently, the study proposes for more visual analyses to be conducted that could work with a larger sample size and therefore yield potentially more relevant and significant findings.

Deutsch

Im letzten Jahrzehnt hat sich das Thema Flüchtlingskrise zu einem stark medialen Thema im rechtsextremen politischen Diskurs in Deutschland und Österreich entwickelt. Die AfD und FPÖ sind rechtsextreme Parteien aus Deutschland und Österreich, die in ihren Wahlkampfplakaten immer wieder Flüchtlinge darstellen und thematisieren. Ziel dieser Studie ist es, die Darstellung von Flüchtlingen auf den Plakaten der FPÖ und der AfD, die zwischen 2015 und 2022 veröffentlicht wurden, zu analysieren und zu vergleichen. Hierzu wurde eine visuelle Erzählanalyse basierend auf Freistein und Gadinger (2020) ausgewählt und durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse zeigten, dass die Flüchtlingsdarstellung sowohl auf den Plakaten der FPÖ als auch der AfD in sechs wiederkehrende Schlüssel narrative eingeteilt werden kann: 1) Frauenrechte, 2) Sicherheit und Kriminalität, 3) unüberbrückbare kulturelle und religiöse Unterschiede, 4) Islam als nationale Bedrohung, 5) Missbrauch westlicher Sozialsysteme und 6) Heimatliebe. Darüber hinaus wurde festgestellt, dass die beiden Parteien zwar die gleiche gesellschaftspolitische Ideologie teilen, ihre Ansätze bei der Darstellung und Vermittlung von Botschaften über Flüchtlinge in ihren Wahlplakaten jedoch deutlich unterschiedlich sind.

Während die FPÖ großen Wert darauf legt, in das Thema Heimatliebe (Thema 6) einzuspielen und den Islam als Bedrohung (Thema 4) darzustellen, konzentriert sich die Plakatstrategie der AfD auf die Darstellung unüberbrückbarer kultureller Differenzen (Thema 3). Darüberhinaus, stellt die FPÖ sehr oft Parteiobmänner auf deren Plakaten dar, während die AfD fast ausschließlich themenrelevante Stockbilder verwendet, um die Textbotschaft ihrer Poster zu untermalen. Anschließend schlägt die Studie die Durchführung weiterer visueller Analysen vor, die mit größeren Stichprobengröße arbeiten und dadurch potenziell aussagekräftigere Ergebnisse liefern könnten.