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The Post-Truth discourse of Right-Wing Populists in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Mobilisation Frames of the FPÖ and AfD

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Abstract

The following thesis investigates to what extent the two right-wing populist parties, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD), strategically employ post-truth claims as a discursive strategy in their communication to mobilize voters during the COVID-19-pandemic. By considering the significant relationship established in previous research between right-wing populism and societal post-truth developments such as the gradual disappearance of collective standards of truth, the growing disregard for objective facts and an increasing distrust for political and scientific institutions, this thesis analyzes how right-wing populists aim to discursively exploit the unprecedented explosion of pandemic-related mis- and disinformation, conspiracy theories and public protest movements witnessed in the COVID-19-crisis for mobilization purposes by focusing on the political communication of the FPÖ and AfD. For this purpose, the Facebook communication of the two parties between February and March 2021 was examined through a qualitative research design structured into two parts. In the first part, the sample which consisted of 219 Facebook posts was analyzed according to a potential post-truth substance by applying a framework for the identification of post-truth strategies in political discourse and communication. 63 posts in the chosen timeframe were hereby identified and in the second step subsequently examined with a Frame Analysis based on the respective conceptualizations in communication and social movement studies. The analysis revealed the reliance of the FPÖ and AfD on a pandemic-related modification of the traditional populist anti-establishment frame as a Master Frame and the prevalence of three dominant Collective Action Frames: 1) a “Capability Frame” which scrutinizes the competence of the government to manage the COVID-19-crisis, 2) a “Corruption Frame” alleging a hidden moneymaking agenda and overall corruptibility of the government during the pandemic and 3) a “Fundamental Rights Frame” presenting governmental mitigation measures and safety restrictions as autocratic restrictions of personal freedoms and fundamental rights. Furthermore, several Frame Alignment processes indicating intentional discursive mobilization efforts have been detected in the framing effort of both parties. Considering the results obtained in both methodological steps, this thesis therefore delivers empirical evidence that both examined parties make use of post-truth claims during the COVID-19-pandemic in their discursive strategies for mobilization purposes.

Keywords: populism, post-truth, COVID-19, pandemic, social media, frame analysis

German Abstract

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit untersucht, inwieweit die beiden rechtspopulistischen Parteien, die Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) und die Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), diskursive „Post-Truth“ Strategien zur WählerInnenmobilisierung während der COVID-19-Pandemie einsetzen. Unter Berücksichtigung des in der bisherigen Forschung festgestellten signifikanten Zusammenhangs zwischen Rechtspopulismus und gesellschaftlicher "Post-Truth"-Entwicklungen, analysiert diese Arbeit, wie österreichische und deutsche Rechtspopulisten die weite Verbreitung pandemiebezogener Des- und Fehlinformation, Verschwörungstheorien und öffentlichen Protestbewegungen für Mobilisierungszwecke in ihrer Kommunikation nutzen. Hierfür wurde die Facebook-Kommunikation der beiden Parteien zwischen Februar und März 2021 mittels eines qualitativen, zweiteiligen Forschungsdesigns untersucht. Im ersten Teil wurde die aus 219 Facebook-Posts bestehende Stichprobe anhand eines Frameworks zur Identifikation von „Post-Truth“ Strategien im politischen Diskurs und in der politischen Kommunikation auf eine mögliche „Post-Truth“ Substanz hin analysiert. Dabei wurden 63 Posts im gewählten Zeitrahmen identifiziert und im zweiten Schritt anschließend mit einer Frame-Analyse untersucht. Die Analyse ergab, dass FPÖ und AfD auf eine pandemiebezogene Modifikation des traditionellen populistischen Anti-Establishment-Frames als Masterframe setzen und drei dominante Collective Action Frames vorherrschen: 1) ein "Capability Frame", das die Kompetenz der Regierung zur Bewältigung der COVID-19-Krise hinterfragt, 2) ein "Corruption Frame", das eine versteckte Geldmacherei und allgemeine Korruptierbarkeit der Regierung während der Pandemie unterstellt, und 3) ein "Fundamental Rights Frame", das die staatlichen Eindämmungsmaßnahmen und Sicherheitsbeschränkungen als autokratische Einschränkungen der persönlichen Freiheiten und Grundrechte darstellt. Darüber hinaus wurden in den Framing-Bemühungen beider Parteien mehrere Frame-Alignment-Prozesse festgestellt, die auf intentionale diskursive Mobilisierungsbemühungen hinweisen. Unter Berücksichtigung der in beiden methodischen Schritten gewonnenen Ergebnisse liefert diese Arbeit somit empirische Belege dafür, dass beide untersuchten Parteien während der COVID-19-Pandemie „Post-Truth“ Behauptungen in ihrer diskursiven Strategie zu Mobilisierungszwecken einsetzen.

Schlagwörter: Populismus, Post-Truth, COVID-19, Pandemie, Social Media, Frame Analyse

Pledge of Honesty

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rodaro', written over a horizontal line.

Manuel Rodaro, Vienna on June 8th, 2021

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1. Introduction

In the last decade, the buzzword “post-truth” has entered public as well as academic spotlight, with journalists, political commentators and scholars alike labelling the contemporary political and societal climate as such. Characterized by the gradual disappearance of collective standards of truth, the growing disregard for objective facts and an increasing distrust for political and scientific institutions¹, this post-truth climate with all its negative implications for issues of social cohesion and democratic stability has been frequently attributed by scholars to the rise of right-wing populism in the last decades in conjunction with the advent of online networks and communication channels.² Moreover, right-wing populist actors have been predominantly blamed and scrutinized for their post-truth politics consisting inter alias of unfounded political claims, disinformation and obfuscation strategies and outright conspiracism.³ Whereas the political campaigns by Trump and the “Leave”-camp during the 2016 US-elections and the run-up to the Brexit-referendum can be viewed as the most prominent initial instances of populist post-truth politics, this dynamic seems to have reached unprecedented proportions during the COVID-19-pandemic. As studies highlight, right-wing populists have considerably contributed to the widespread societal uncertainty and distrust the COVID-19-crisis has evoked by discrediting health experts, simplifying the pandemic and resorting to their typical Manichean rhetoric of “us” versus “them”.⁴ What is more, many populist actors across Europe have been quick to realize, that the unparalleled proliferation of pandemic-related conspiracy theories, mis- and disinformation on online media channels and social networks, which even lead the WHO to assess the current state of affairs as an “infodemic”⁵, as well as the growing protest dynamics against governmental COVID-19-mitigation measures carry significant potential for voter mobilization.⁶

1.1. Research Question and Thesis Overview

The aim of this thesis will be to shine a light on how right-wing populists in Europe are currently trying to tap into this potential by focusing on the example of the German AfD as

¹ See Davis, Post-Truth: Why We Have Reached Peak Bullshit and What We Can Do About It, 2017; See

D’Ancona, Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back, 2017

² See Speed/Mannion, The Rise of Post-truth Populism in Pluralist Liberal Democracies, 2017

³ See York, Post-Truth and Populism: A Populist Framework for Defending the Truth in a Post-factual Era, 2018

⁴ See Eberl/Huber/Greussing, From Populism to the ‘Plandemic’: Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies, 2020; See Lasco, Medical populism and the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020

⁵ See WHO, Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation, 2020

⁶ See Vieten, The “New Normal” and “Pandemic Populism”, 2020

well as the Austrian FPÖ. Based on the obvious importance of political communication for voter mobilization, the guiding hypothesis of this thesis is that these right-wing populist parties are strategically employing pandemic-related post-truth claims as a discursive strategy in their communication to mobilize voters in the current climate of increased public distrust and uncertainty. In this sense, the following research question can be deduced: To what extent does the political communication of right-wing populists in Germany and Austria make use of post-truth claims for the purpose of political mobilization in the context of the COVID-19 crisis?

In order to provide an answer to this question, this thesis will begin by examining the current state of research on the topic. A special focus hereby is put on academic contributions that elaborate on the relation between right-wing populism, the COVID-19-pandemic and mis- and disinformation as well as conspiracy theories. The subsequent pages of this study are structured into five main chapters. The first chapter focuses on the theoretical framework of this thesis and provides an overview on the different approaches in the conceptualization and definition of populism, before moving on to examining right-wing populism as a specific form of the phenomenon. Furthermore, this chapter examines the concept of post-truth and will shine light on its theoretical background and its connection to populism as well as the internet. By presenting practical examples of post-truth politics, an insight into the matter is provided and a framework to identify practices of post-truth politics is subsequently established. Lastly, this chapter elaborates on the perspectives on framing theory in communication and social movement studies in order to provide a basis for the subsequent frame analysis.

The second chapter gives a detailed account of the methodology this thesis relies on, which includes a description of the research strategy as well as an explanation on why the two right-wing populist parties FPÖ and AfD were selected as main cases. This chapter further elaborates on the selection and composition of the sample which is analyzed later in this thesis. The third chapter provides the background for the research and delves deeper into the relation between post-truth and the COVID-19-pandemic by elaborating on the supposed “infodemic”, investigating the role of right-wing populists and examining governmental mitigation measures as well as the public response to them. It further gives an overview on the history and the ideology of the FPÖ and AfD and compares their political conduct during the COVID-19 crisis.

In the fourth chapter, the guiding question of this thesis is empirically researched by qualitatively analyzing the communication of the FPÖ and AfD. The analytical scope of this thesis has been narrowed down to official social media posts on Facebook in the timeframe from February 1st to March 31st, 2021, which function as a representative sample of the political communication of both parties to investigate to what extent post-truth claims are used for political mobilization in the context of the COVID-19-crisis. By operationalizing and employing the Post-Truth Identification Framework established in the chapter focusing on the theoretical framework, all of the posts in the sample are first examined in regard to a possible post-truth substance. Subsequently, a frame analysis is performed on the posts that are identified as post-truth claims to illustrate which narrative frames are employed by the two right-wing populist parties and reveal the strategic purpose behind their post-truth communication. Finally, this thesis concludes in the last chapter by drawing a summary of the results and providing an outlook for further research on the matter in question.

2. State of Research

Although merely a year passed since the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19-pandemic in January 2020, there is a fast-growing body of research studying the significance of the COVID-19-crisis for populism. Much of the existing literature focuses on the responses of populist actors during the pandemic, especially regarding the influence of the current pandemic on the constant rise of populism in the last decades, and as the findings in a comprehensive report on populist responses in sixteen different European countries by Katsambekis and Stavrakakis (2020) suggest, there is a wide variety of populist reactions.⁷ This variety can be seen as the origin of the ongoing scholastic debate on the significance and implications of the current pandemic for the future of populism, with some scholars like Kleine-Brockhoff (2020) arguing that the evident maladministration and ideological inconsistency of populist policy-makers during the current crisis have predominantly hurt their case and demonstrated the limitations of populism.⁸ While there seems to be a general academic consensus that populist policy-makers have shown a lack of an adequate responsiveness during the crisis, which in turn could constitute a short-term political disadvantage, many scholars put an emphasize in their work on the dangers of ongoing state-

⁷ See Katsambekis /Stavrakakis, *Populism and the Pandemic. A Collaborative Report*, 2020

⁸ See Kleine-Brockhof, *Why Populist Nationalists Are Not Having a Good Crisis Yet*, 2020

capture dynamics by authoritarian, far-right populists witnessed across Europe as well as possible benefits for the populist cause through future implications of the pandemic like an imminent economic crisis.⁹ Contributing to the academic assessment of populist responses to the pandemic, some scholars suggest new definitions of the pandemic-related excesses of populism. Notable hereby are Lasco (2020), who analyzed the similarities in the COVID-19-related actions of Trump, Bolsonaro and Duterte and defines their political style as “Medical Populism”¹⁰, as well as Vieten (2020), who establishes the definition of a “pandemic populism” through a small-scale study of German populist and far-right online and offline communication in a 6-month span in 2020.¹¹ Others, like Gugushvili et al. (2020), highlight public health aspects of populist responses to the pandemic, illustrating the historic connection between deteriorating public health and populist gains and the current correlation between populism and the spread of COVID-19.¹²

Due to its recency, no significant amount of literature that focuses on the connection between populism and the growing dynamic of public protest during the COVID-19-crisis exists yet. In general, academic research on these protests is only in an early stage, but an increasing scientific interest in these dynamics is already visible. Some relevant quantitative sociological studies on the “Querdenker”-movement in Germany have recently been conducted by Pantenburg et al. (2021) and by Nachtwey et al. (2020), both of them highlighting the distrust in traditional institutions of the establishment prevailing among protesters and their general political disaffection.¹³ To a greater extent, scholastic interest in the evident surge of COVID-19-related conspiratorial beliefs has risen in the past months. And although research on the growth on conspiracy theories during the current pandemic is also only in an early stage, some scholarly works have already highly contributed to the growing body of research. Brennen et al. (2020) have illustrated the massive scale and the various types of COVID-19-related misinformation which is circulating online through a comprehensive systematic social media content analysis, impelling them to endorse the assessment of the WHO that the current situation is an “infodemic”.¹⁴ Similar studies proving the wide proliferation of false COVID-

⁹ See Bayerlein/Gyöngyös, *The Impact of Covid-19 on Populism: Will it be weakened?*, 2020; See Sweezy, *Populism and Covid-19: The necessity of a coordinated response*, 2020; See Halikiopoulou, *The political implications of COVID-19: what now for populism?*, 2020

¹⁰ See Lasco, *Medical populism and the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020

¹¹ See Vieten, *The “New Normal” and “Pandemic Populism”*, 2020

¹² See Gugushvili et.al., *Are Populist Leaders Creating the Conditions for the Spread of COVID-19?*, 2020

¹³ See Nachtwey/Schäfer/Frei, *Politische Soziologie der Corona-Proteste*, 2020; See Pantenburg/Reichardt/Sepp, *Corona-Proteste und das (Gegen-) Wissen sozialer Bewegungen*, 2021

¹⁴ See Brennen /Simon/Hoard/Nielsen, *Types, Sources, and Claims of COVID-19 Misinformation*, 2020

19-related information have been conducted inter alia by Blackbird.AI (2020), discovering a 38.7 percentage of inorganic disinformation content in the approximately 7 million analyzed tweets in February 2020¹⁵, and by Boberg et al. (2020) from January to March of the same year, highlighting the prominence of COVID-19-conspiracy theories in alternative media outlets through a computational content analysis of Facebook posts in Germany.¹⁶

However, there is only little existing research on the interconnection and relation between right-wing populism and the pandemic-induced rise of conspiracy theories, with a substantial part of studies conducted until now focusing on how personal belief systems are connected to the propensity for conspiratorial thinking and suggesting an interdependency between right-wing political attitudes and conspiracy belief.¹⁷ Notable contributions can be found in an Austrian study by Eberl et al. (2020), which demonstrates a positive relationship of citizen's populist attitudes and COVID-19-conspiracy beliefs through the usage of a Structural Equation Model¹⁸, and in an analytical study of 2.6 Million COVID-19-related tweets over a ten-day span in March 2020 by Graham et al. (2020), that showcases the coordinated spread of mis- and disinformation based on conspiracy theories for mainly right-wing political purposes.¹⁹ The apparent lack of academic interest in the topic is rather surprising, especially since the relationship between populism and conspiracy theories is nothing inherently new and has already been illustrated by scholars in the past. The origin for most of the previous research into that matter can be found in Hofstadter's (1964) notion of a "paranoid style of politics", a term coined to describe the conspiratorial anti-communist propaganda of the radical-right in the post-war period²⁰, and the psychological study about "The Authoritarian Personality" by Adorno et al. (1950), demonstrating a correlation between conspiratorial thinking and right-wing authoritarianism.²¹

While subsequent studies in the field of political psychology have further established a positive relation between the tendency to belief in conspiracy theories and right-wing

¹⁵ See Blackbird.AI, COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Disinformation Report, 2020

¹⁶ See Boberg/Quandt/Schatko-Eckrodt/Frichlisch, Pandemic Populism: Facebook Pages of Alternative News Media and the Corona Crisis, 2020

¹⁷ See Rothmund et al., Scientific Trust, Risk Assessment, and Conspiracy Beliefs about COVID-19, 2020; See Calvillo et al., Political Ideology Predicts Perceptions of the Threat of COVID-19, 2020; See Alper, Psychological correlates of COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs and preventive measures: Evidence from Turkey, 2020

¹⁸ See Eberl/Huber/Greussing, From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies, 2020

¹⁹ See Graham et.al., Like a virus: the coordinated spread of coronavirus disinformation, 2020

²⁰ See Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics, 1964

²¹ See Adorno et al., The Authoritarian Personality, 1950

ideology²², the academic contribution from Silva et al. (2017) is especially noteworthy, since it showcases a strong connection between populist attitudes and conspiracy belief based on an anti-elitist discursive element.²³ In a case study about similarities in the ideological framings of the White Power Movement and the Tea Party, Dobratz and Waldner (2016) have further demonstrated that conspiracy theories can serve as bridging frames between populist and conspiratorial-extremist movements, facilitating reciprocal interaction and mobilization of followers.²⁴ The tendency of populist actors to use conspiracy theories as a political strategy and to include conspiratorial tropes in their rhetorical framework has been repeatedly highlighted by scholars²⁵, with substantial parts of the relevant contemporary literature deriving from the notion, that the last decade has heralded the era of post-truth, where personal beliefs and opinions have become more influential than objective facts and the societal agreement about what constitutes reality is gradually eroding.²⁶ Post-truth theory has recently entered into the spotlight of academic interest and has been defined as a “political or social condition whereby citizens or audiences and politicians no longer respect truth (...), but simply accept as true what they believe or feel”²⁷, and political actors bend the reality to fit their own opinions, creating a so called “alternative reality” while deliberately attempting to undermine objective facts, scientific research as well as theoretical knowledge and delegitimizing scientific claims by spreading false information and discrediting traditional institutional gatekeepers of truth.²⁸ Its contemporary popularity can be traced back to the political developments of 2016 (Trump/Brexit), and therefore it is unsurprising, that a significant part of the growing body of research on this matter addresses the phenomenon of post-truth in connection with populism.²⁹

²² See Abalakina-Paap et al., *Beliefs in Conspiracies*, 1999; See Bruder et al., *Measuring Individual Differences in Generic Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories Across Cultures: Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire*, 2013; See Grzesiak-Feldman/Irzycka, *Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Conspiracy Thinking in a Polish Sample*. In: *Psychological Reports*, 2009

²³ See Silva et al., *The Elite Is Up to Something: Exploring the Relation Between Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories*, 2017

²⁴ See Dobratz/Waldner, *The White Power Movement’s Populist Connection to the Tea Party Movement in the United States*, 2016

²⁵ See Bergman, *Conspiracy & Populism: The Politics of Misinformation*, 2018; See Harambam, *Contemporary Conspiracy Culture*, 2020, See Sunstein/Vermeule, *Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures*, 2009

²⁶ See Davis, *Post-Truth: Why We Have Reached Peak Bullshit and What We Can Do About It*, 2017; See D’Ancona, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back*, 2017

²⁷ Harsin, *Post-Truth and Critical Communication*, 2018, p. 2

²⁸ See Bufacchi, *Truth, lies and tweets: A Consensus Theory of Post-Truth*, 2020, p. 4ff.; See McIntyre, *The scientific attitude: defending science from denial, fraud, and pseudoscience*, 2019, p 5f.; See Brahms, *Philosophy of Post-Truth*, p. 3ff.

²⁹ See Gibson, *The Post-Truth Double Helix: Reflexivity and Mistrust in Local Politics*, 2018; See Speed/Mannion, *The Rise of Post-truth Populism in Pluralist Liberal Democracies*, 2017; See York, *Post-Truth and Populism: A Populist Framework for Defending the Truth in a Post-factual Era*, 2018

The main aim of this thesis is to fill the gap in the existing research on how right-wing populist parties are strategically employing post-truth claims for mobilization purposes in their political communication. By doing so, this thesis will further contribute to the general academic study of populism and right-wing populism in particular, especially in regard to the growing body of research on the interrelation of right-wing populism and post-truth politics. By examining the concept of post-truth and the characteristics of post-truth politics, this thesis will furthermore contribute to the recent academic trend of systematically approaching the study of the post-truth phenomenon and enrich the literature on current post-truth developments in the COVID-19-pandemic.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Populism: Definition and Conceptualization

An extensive body of research has accumulated over the last decades discussing the political phenomenon of populism in practically every imaginable aspect. Nevertheless, there is a persistent and significant ambiguity as well as an ongoing academic debate among multiple disciplines regarding the conceptualization and definition of Populism. As Gidron and Bonikowski (2013) highlight, three main approaches in the conceptual definition of Populism can be identified across the relevant literature in the fields of political science and sociology.³⁰

The first to be mentioned here is the ideational approach in defining the phenomena of populism, which emphasizes the importance of underlying ideological features as the driver of populist movements and as main point of analysis for scholars. As Hawkins and Kaltwasser (2017) highlight, at least part of the foundations on which this ideology-centered analysis of populism was further developed can be found in the pioneering attempts of Ernesto Laclau in theorizing the phenomena in the South-American context, especially in regards the shared prominence of ideas and identity.³¹ Proponents of the ideational approach like Cas Mudde (2004), who focused his study on European right-wing populist movements that emerged in the 1980s, define populism as a “thin-centered ideology”, that is predominantly based on a suggested antagonism between to homogenous societal groups - the “corrupt elite” on the one hand and the “pure people” on the other.³² “Thin-centered” hereby

³⁰ See Gidron/Bonikowski, *Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda*, 2013, p. 5

³¹ See Hawkins/Kaltwasser, *The Ideational Approach to Populism*, 2017, p. 514ff.

³² See Mudde, *The populist Zeitgeist*, 2004, p. 543

refers to the conceptual troika of the people, the elite and the general will constituting the weak ideological core of populism which loosely bundles additional ideological features that populist borrow from other ideologies depending on the political context they are situated in. In comparison to fully-fledged ideologies like liberalism or socialism, populism predominantly relies on these three concepts in its ideological scope without providing a comprehensive political program for specific societal, economic or institutional issues.

Whereas Laclau's (2005) theory on populism considers the concepts of the people and the elite as "empty signifiers" that create collective identification and produce a popular identity through their antagonistic relationship³³, the ideational approach goes a step further by highlighting the moral element in this antagonism and its influence on the constitution and definition of the respective groups. The signifiers therefore are not seen to be completely empty, but rather to some extent dependent on elements of self-identification or -perception of the societal community targeted by populist politics as well as on features of the accompanying ideologies to populism.³⁴ In this sense, the defining elements in the perception and definition of the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" can vary significantly among populist movements depending on the "socio-political context within which the populist actors mobilize" and may therefore differ between regions or countries given the different "national, regional, and historical circumstances"³⁵. The common denominator in the populist worldview however rests on the presupposed Manichean societal division as well as on the belief in a primacy of the public "volonté general" in politics.³⁶ This general will is deduced from the peoples' homogeneity and based on a claimed common sense deriving from the obvious and logical collective interests of the pure community, which populists express through their politics in their supposed role as the genuine voice of the people. Set against it are the special interests of the corrupt elite and its manifestation in politics, which populists are fighting against on behalf of the people.³⁷

The second strain of populism study considers populism as a discursive political style or a mean of rhetoric expression used "selectively and strategically" by political actors rather than an ideology underlying their actions. It therefore can be found employed by political actors

³³ See Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 2005

³⁴ See Mudde, *Populism: An Ideational Approach*, 2017, p 30ff.

³⁵ Mudde/Kaltwasser, *Voices of the Peoples: Populism in Europe and Latin America compared*, 2001, p. 2

³⁶ See Mudde, *The populist Zeitgeist*, 2004, p. 543

³⁷ See Mudde, *Populism: An Ideational Approach*, 2017, p 33f.

from the entirety of the political spectrum, from left to right.³⁸ Similar to the ideational approach, advocates of this discursive approach see the cornerstones of populist discourse in the Manichean relationship between “the people” and “the elite” which is expressed through the rhetorical construction of a moral struggle in politics between “us” and “them” as well as the referral to popular sovereignty and popular will.³⁹ However, these fundamental elements are not considered to be the ideological basis on which populism builds as a whole, but rather discursive features which can be incorporated to different degrees in the political communication of political actors. The analytical scope of this approach therefore centers on conceptualizing the fluidity of populism and measuring to what extent a populist style is deployed instead of construing an ideological typologisation.⁴⁰ The third approach defines populism as a political strategy pursued by “personalistic leaders” to mobilize and organize “large number of followers” in order to attain and “exercise government power”.⁴¹ Advocated for by scholars like Kurt Weyland (2017), who’s academic study focuses on left-wing populism in Latin-American countries, this political-strategic approach therefore centers on the relation between a populist leader and his constituents as well as on the mobilization mechanisms employed by the former. A defining element hereby is a personalistic leadership style which translates into the organizational structures of populist parties or movements and a power capability that is based on mass mobilization and support. The populist leader postulates himself as the embodiment of the will of the people and opportunistically sways his followers with direct appeals and volatile policy claims.⁴²

While the conceptual theoretical and methodological features may to a certain extent differ among the three definitions of Populism, more recent literature highlights the similarities and overlaps between the approaches, stressing the importance of their reciprocal non-excludability and connectivity for a comprehensive analysis of populism.⁴³ After all, the conceptualization of “the people” as an homogenous group and main point of referral and identification for populist actors combined with an anti-elite and anti-establishment stance has been established by all three approaches as the main defining element of populism and is

³⁸ See Gidron/Bonikowski, *Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda*, 2013, p. 8

³⁹ See Jagers/Walgrave, *Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium*, 2007, p. 320ff.

⁴⁰ See Gidron/Bonikowski, *Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda*, 2013, p. 7f.

⁴¹ See Weyland, *Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics*, 2001, p. 14, cited in Rodaro, *Populism, Social Media and the Dangers for Democracy*, 2020, p. 3

⁴² See Weyland, *Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach*, 2017, p. 55ff.

⁴³ See Engesser/Fawzi/Larsson, *Populist online communication*, 2017, p. 1280; See Jansen, *Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism*, 2011, See Gidron/Bonikowski, *Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda*, 2013, p. 14

inherent to all of them.⁴⁴ The difference in the three approaches seem to stem in part from the disparate contexts their analytical scope is directed at, may they be geographical, political or time-related. Thus, the success of applying a single conceptualization of populism for the analysis of its real present-day examples can only be limited, especially since the phenomena of populism itself is constantly developing and changing. It is not surprising, that none of the three approaches can deliver on its promise to establish a sound operationalization of populism, which would make a comparative analysis of its different shapes and shades conceivable. While a precise conceptualization of the broad term populism which includes a certain travelability seems to be difficult to attain, a differentiated look on specific forms of populism may be more practicable, in particular when following the argument of the ideational approach that populism always resorts to attaching a second ideology to itself. This thesis will therefore further investigate a specific form of populism on the next pages, namely right-wing populism, which in a contemporary context is one of the most frequently encountered ones. However, according to its scope, this thesis can generally be described as being situated at the intersection of all three approaches and will therefore follow the less restrictive path in more recent populism research that acknowledges the validity of the main elements emphasized in the different approaches and subsequently considers them equally in the conceptualization of the phenomenon.

3.1.1. Right-Wing Populism: Definition and Conceptualization

Parties or movements that are generally classified as radical-right populist or right-wing populist belong to the currently most prominent type of contemporary populism in a western context. These parties experienced a wave of electoral success across European countries from the 1980's onwards and gradually developed into a fully-fledged party family over the last decades with increasing popular appeal. While their origin and the initial impetus for their creation differ among the various national movements and parties, the centerpiece of their shared political distinctiveness is the combination of a nativist and authoritarian ideology with the key elements of populism.⁴⁵ The Manichean societal division propagated by right-wing populists is hereby not only extrapolated from an anti-elitist standpoint, but also based on xenophobic, islamophobic and nationalist arguments. In comparison to other forms of populism, for example those in combination with socialism, the ideological fusion with a

⁴⁴ See Jagers/Walgrave, Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium, 2007, p. 321

⁴⁵ See Mudde, Three decades of populist radical right parties in Western Europe: so what?, 2017, p. 3

radical right ideology therefore entails a far more restricted usage of the populist concept of “the people”, which in its very nature becomes exclusionary since the boundaries determining belonging are defined by ideologically loaded attributes such as race, ethnicity or religion. The exact delimitation of these boundaries can vary depending on the situational context in which right-wing populist operate. For example, Christianity functions as a stronger criterion in the definition of the people for right-wing populists in the United States than in Europe.

However, the common denominator in defining the people among right-wing populists’ rests on the standpoint of nation- or region-specific cultural homogeneity and a supposed incompatibility of these different cultures. Whereas the traditional radical-right based its ideology on alleged racial differences, the populist radical-right uses culture as a surrogate. As elaborated by Zakaria (2016), the concept of culture based on shared values has substituted economic factors like class as main identity driver and important political cleavage line due to the gradual convergence of economic beliefs across the political spectrum after the end of the Cold War.⁴⁶ This identity-related polarization of cultural differences due to a progressive societal development is exploited by right-wing populists through discursively postulating that the “everyday-man’s” way of life is under threat . The natural evolution of traditional value systems relating to family, marriage, gender roles or sexuality is construed as a forced change driven forward by a corrupt and selfish political elite that penalizes “ordinary” people and favors all sorts of minorities. The populist moral struggle between “us, the people” and “them, the elite“ is therefore transformed to a cultural struggle between a homogenous majority with a common identity and a devious establishment.⁴⁷

Moreover, by linking the narrative of this cultural struggle with the fast-growing wealth gap and income divide actually perceived by lower and middle socio-economic classes in western democracies, right-wing populists are capable of offering easy-sounding solutions to complex problems and concerns. The fear of losing affluence in western countries is certainly comprehensible in light of an increasingly unstable global economic system based on unhinged globalization resulting in declining incomes, fewer employment opportunities and negative growth rates, which in turn would justify any general critique of the capitalist economic system. Right-wing populists however, even though they are generally negatively

⁴⁶ See Zakaria, *Populism on the March. Why the West is in trouble*, 2016, p. 12f.

⁴⁷ See Greven, *The Rise of Right-wing Populism in Europe and the United States A Comparative Perspective*, 2016, p. 1ff.

disposed to globalization, put the blame primarily on immigrants or other marginalized groups who get accused of stealing jobs and exploiting the welfare system. That such a rather simple narrative does carry a certain appeal for a large part of the population is unsurprising since it is indeed touching upon actually experienced aspects of every-day reality. Over the last decades, dynamics of mass migration have exponentially accelerated. Europe alone has witnessed the influx of 76 Million immigrants during the so-called migration crisis in 2015.⁴⁸

The resulting public anxiety connected to this issue as well as the evident failure of mainstream politics to properly address related concerns and propose sustainable solutions are strongly contributing to the previously elaborated appeal of right-wing populist narratives, which exploit the topic of immigration by linking it to economic decline and a supposed cultural takeover, for which the political elite stands as a culprit that is facilitating this dynamic. To promote their narratives, right-wing populists predominantly have been resorting to a radical, emotionalized and uncompromising discourse fueled with prejudices, Manichean bigotry and outright conspiracism as well as an aggressive and provocative rhetorical style that is based on exaggeration, taboo-breaking and political in-correctness.⁴⁹ The advent of online social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter has certainly contributed to the recent success of right-wing populist parties and their discourse, with many of them proving to be “early-technology-adapters” by recognizing the potential these platforms carry for mobilizing as well as proliferating their discourse and instrumentalizing it accordingly.⁵⁰

3.2. Post-Truth: Concept and Practice

The concept of post-truth has gained significant trajectory in academic and public discourse over the last decade and became a prominent research objective for scholars across various fields of study not least since the U.S.-election and the Brexit-referendum in 2016, with the Oxford Dictionary even declaring “post-truth” as the “word of the year” and defining it as “an adjective (...) relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”.⁵¹ Due to its newfound popularity however, the term itself is still significantly contested in academia and scholars have repeatedly pointed out, that a clear and satisfactory conceptualization of post-

⁴⁸ See Zakaria, *Populism on the March. Why the West is in trouble*, 2016, p. 14

⁴⁹ See Greven, *The Rise of Right-wing Populism in Europe and the United States A Comparative Perspective*, 2016, p. 5f.

⁵⁰ See Bartlett/Birdwell/Littler, *The new face of digital populism*, 2011, p. 32ff.

⁵¹ See OxfordLanguages, *Word of the Year 2016*, n.d.

truth and its politics, which does not rely for the most part on popular discourse, is yet to be found.⁵² And although scholarly opinion differs on the precise definition of the term, its newness and even its theoretical origin, with some scholars accrediting its roots to postmodernism and constructionism⁵³ or others to Hannah Arendt's (1967) analysis of the relationship between politics and factual truth⁵⁴, there is a prevalent academic consensus that the phenomenon which the term aims to describe has significant topicality and warrants scientific interest and empirical analysis.

3.2.1. A Post-Truth Society – the cornerstone of our present time?

But how can one explain the current popular obsession with this buzzword? And what are the reasons that contemporary socio-political research increasingly touches upon the issue of post-truth and more and more scholars are impelled to characterize the current state of affairs as a post-truth era or a post-truth society? In order to answer these questions, it might help to start with analyzing the meaning of the linguistic components of the term itself. As Vittorio Bufacchi (2020) so accurately clarifies, the pre-fix “post” in the term post-truth does not relate in a chronological fashion to a moment after a specific situation which it does in words like “post-surgery” or “post-war”, but rather refers “to a time in which the specified idea (in our case ‘truth’) has become redundant and therefore can safely be discarded”.⁵⁵ Classifying our current historical timeframe as post-truth therefore implies that the concept of truth, which by its nature is the cornerstone of our shared reality by being derived from objective, verifiable and perceivable facts, has de facto become irrelevant and obsolete. Instead, something else, may it be personal beliefs and opinions, emotions, or ideologies, has substituted objective truth in its previous role as minimal common denominator in all aspects of our collective living and point of departure in our collective thinking.

This assessment is as far as the academic consensus goes in respect to the concept of post-truth. Further scholastic contemplations very much differ on the origin of this development, its suggested novelty, its scientific accuracy as well as its legitimacy as a whole.⁵⁶ And although a theory-based discussion about the conceptualization of the phenomenon of post-truth is certainly valid and has an important place in the research on this topic, a more

⁵² See Hyvönen, *Careless Speech: Conceptualizing Post-Truth Politics*, 2018, p. 2f.

⁵³ See Wigth, *Post-Truth, Postmodernism and Alternative Facts*, 2018

⁵⁴ See Bufacchi, *Truth, lies and tweets: A Consensus Theory of Post-Truth*, 2020

⁵⁵ See *Ibd.*, p. 2

⁵⁶ See Brahms, *Philosophy of Post-Truth*, p. 3ff.

practical approach oriented at contemporary material social and political developments might yield a better result in shining light on the concept. By following the previously established definition of minimal consensus and endorsing the reflection, that factually verifiable truth has substantially decreased in value from an overall societal standpoint, one can indeed observe some factors that are not only essential for the emergence of the phenomenon but also key features of contemporary “post-truth” developments.

3.2.2. The Internet and the crux of unlimited and unfiltered Information

The advent of the Internet brought about by rapid technological improvements can certainly be described as turning point in human history which had and continues to have an immeasurable impact on virtually the entire world. It is undeniable that digital progress has proven to be an indispensable asset to many facets of our life, but certain features of the online infrastructure have also considerably contributed to the development of the current societal condition of post-truth. Firstly, the Internet has led to what some scholars define as the era of information explosion.⁵⁷ Never before have we been able to consume greater amounts of information at such a rapid pace than now. And never was it harder to thoroughly check the sources of this information and safeguard its factuality. The sheer amount of information everyone is exposed to daily makes this an impossible task and the nature of the online environment has proven to be additionally detrimental to this effect. Previously, the information we consumed was already filtered, contextualized and in the best-case fact-checked by institutional gatekeepers like traditional media and journalism, academia or experts in the various fields of knowledge and trust in these “truth-tellers” was essential for consumers to believe in the factuality of the published information.⁵⁸ These gatekeepers were by far not immune against manipulation or political interference, but since their currency was their credibility, some degree of evidence-based information deliverance was presupposed. Nowadays however, these intermediaries become increasingly redundant with the online environment offering everyone the possibility to create, disperse, reproduce or modify information no matter the content or the context as well as to reach a public on an unprecedented scale. Moreover, the abundance of information forces these former gatekeepers now to even stronger compete for the attention of the consumers, increasingly leading them to emphasize quantity over quality and emotional sensationalism over rational factuality.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Brahms, *Philosophy of Post-Truth*, p. 9

⁵⁸ See *Ibid.*, p. 9

⁵⁹ See Hendrick/Vestergaard, *Reality Lost. Markets of Attention, Misinformation and Manipulation*, 2019, p. 2ff.

The emergence of social networks has accelerated this trend and introduced additional problematic aspects to the increasing digitalization of the world. Online platforms like Facebook or Twitter not only facilitate the fast proliferation of (mis-)information but have also “brought about an interactive, non-linear, non-pyramidal (non-hierarchical) communication process” which is founded on the expression of opinion, tribalism and polarized discussion dynamics.⁶⁰ The wide array of subjective opinions and personal beliefs that are disseminated on these platforms complement the overflow in information exposure in creating a digital environment that makes it increasingly difficult for users to distinguish between fact and fiction. Furthermore, essential features of social networks which are frequently referred to as “Echo Chambers” or “Filter Bubbles” create secluded spheres of congruent opinions where users are automatically thrown into through algorithms assessing their online behavior, resulting in a constant exposure to attitude-fitting content and avoidance of divergent information or dissenting views.⁶¹ As Bartlett (2011) points out, this “sustained exposure to a selective output can harden viewpoints and create a false body of evidence, based upon which an individual makes flawed judgments about the wider world”, which in turn is amplified by the lack of time, possibility and will of most users to critically evaluate the credibility of the information that is consumed online.⁶²

3.2.3. Populism and Post-Truth – Two sides of the same coin?

All this not only leads to a deepening societal polarization but also contributes to the development, that subjective opinions and personal beliefs seem to become more important in interpreting aspects of reality than fact-base evidence. With social media becoming the main source of information and tool for communication for a large part of the population as well as increasingly developing into the central hub of public debate, political parties and actors have been keen on utilizing the digital environment to spread their messages, gather support and mobilize voters. Especially right-wing populist politicians and parties are exceptionally successful in using this new communication opportunity for their advantage by exploiting the newly established direct linkage to their constituency through the people-centered and anti-elitist populist communication logic. Social Networks constitute the perfect playing field for

⁶⁰ See Poulakidakos/Veneti/Frantonikolopoulos, Post-truth, propaganda and the transformation of the spiral of silence, 2018, p. 7

⁶¹ See Rodaro, Populism, Social Media and the Dangers for Democracy, 2020, p. 7f.

⁶² See Bartlett/Birdwell/Littler, The new face of digital populism, 2011, p. 107

right-wing populists to directly disseminate their ideology among citizens and spread their messages without having to pass through any censoring filters of the mainstream media.⁶³

Moreover, the emotionally loaded, polarizing and sensational populist rhetoric seems to be perfectly suited for a digital communication culture in which opinions and emotions often carry more weight than evidence or facts and rumors, prejudices and fear can spread at an alarming rate.⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, leading right-wing populists seem to be at the forefront of the current wave of misinformation, half-lies and conspiracism that is washing over the digital world. From Donald Trump to Matteo Salvini and Viktor Orban – most right-wing populist strongmen not only have built up a considerable following over the last decade, but have also become notoriously known for their inflammatory, truth-distorting and deceptive social media presence, which capitalizes on partisan communication dynamics inherent to platforms like Facebook and Twitter by relying on deceitful propaganda meant to strengthen existing prejudices and ignorance among their followers and increase the share of votes.⁶⁵

But populist actors do not only profit from the current digital environment, their polarizing politics also considerably contributed to the accelerating contemporary societal condition of post-truth throughout the last 30 years and continue to do so.⁶⁶ The simultaneity of a macrosocial devaluation of fact-based truth and the rise of right-wing populism is not coincidental, but rather interrelated. The very essence of populist anti-elitism is the delegitimization of established societal institutions that might prove to be hostile towards their cause, which includes mainstream politics, traditional media as well as the scientific and academic community. The fostering of public distrust towards these institutions has thus always been a fundamental strategy of populism, materializing in their continuous attacks on institutional representatives and experts as well as the constant questioning of their objectivity and neutrality⁶⁷. In this sense it becomes evident, that the contemporary post-truth developments can in fact be seen as the result of right-wing populists reaping the harvest that they sowed.

⁶³ See Bartlett/Birdwell/Littler, *The new face of digital populism*, 2011, p. 30ff.

⁶⁴ See Speed/Mannion, *The Rise of Post-truth Populism in Pluralist Liberal Democracies*, 2017, p. 250

⁶⁵ See Jacobs/Spierings, *A populist paradise? Examining populists' Twitter adoption and use*, 2019, p. 1683ff.

⁶⁶ See York, *Post-Truth and Populism: A Populist Framework for Defending the Truth in a Post-factual Era*, 2018; See Speed/Mannion, *The Rise of Post-truth Populism in Pluralist Liberal Democracies*, 2017

⁶⁷ See Gibson, *The Post-Truth Double Helix: Reflexivity and Mistrust in Local Politics*, 2018, p. 3176

3.2.4. Post-Truth in Practice – What makes discourses and politics post-truth?

Whereas the term post-truth can be used to denote the contemporary macrosocial condition elaborated on the previous pages, the scope of this thesis necessitates a closer look on how this condition materializes in practice and what kind of methods contribute to its reinforcement. In other words, a conceptualization of the politics of post-truth is needed. While the present fascination with the concept can be largely traced back to the most prominent example and incarnation of post-truth politics, former US-President Donald Trump, the term itself is not anew in academia and has already gained prominence some years earlier under a similar, but also much different context, namely in regard to the presidency of George Bush. The books “The Post-Truth Era” from Ralph Keyes and Eric Altermans “When presidents Lie” from 2004 as well as Harry Frankfurt’s “On Bullshit” from 2005 all center on the former president’s supposed disregard for factual truth and repetitive dishonesty.⁶⁸ The concept of post-truth politics is hereby predominantly derived from the political practice of lying or at least of concealing the truth. The equation of post-truth politics with outright lying might have been sufficient for a conceptualization of the term in the context of that time, when respective discussions were mostly centering on the US administration’s approach to foreign policy, but falls short of the mark when looked at through a contemporary lens.

In order to assess the concept of post-truth politics in a current context, it may help to draw from Hannah Arendt’s considerations on the relationship between truth and politics in her eponymous essay from 1967, in which she distinguishes traditional and modern political lies. Whereas the former concerned falsehoods about specific aspects of reality, which were only meant to deceive an opponent or a different particular subject in pre-modern times of state diplomacy and politics and made “no attempt to change the whole context” in which the lie and the respective truth were embedded in, the modern political lie reaches beyond that. Referring to dynamics of “rewriting history” witnessed in totalitarian regimes of the 20th Century, Arendt highlights that modern political lies are meant to deceive everybody, including the liar himself, by being “so big that they require a complete rearrangement of the whole factual texture – the making of another reality, as it were”.⁶⁹

Even though Arendt’s theory on modern political lies was established in reference to the practices of totalitarian regimes she herself witnessed at that time, the essence of her

⁶⁸ Harsin, Post-Truth and Critical Communication, 2018, p. 7

⁶⁹ Arendt, Truth and Politics, 1967, p.12f.

considerations does address an essential feature of the contemporary phenomenon of post-truth. As Vittorio Bufacchi (2020) rightfully points out while building on Arendt's contemplations, post-truth politics is far more than just lying, "bullshitting", or concealing facts, it is about subverting truth in its entirety. Whereas lying requires the liar to understand and accept what the truth would be in order to decide not to tell it or tell it differently and "bullshitting" simply is about ignoring or circumventing the truth whenever it comes in handy, post-truth "aims to undermine the theoretical infrastructure that makes it possible to have a conversation about the truth"⁷⁰. It therefore purposely destroys the foundation onto which our collective understanding of reality is built upon and opens the door for completely alternative interpretations of real-life experiences. Based on these considerations, Bufacchi continues to draw up a general definition of post-truth in his work on a "consensus theory" of post-truth, which suggests that the term itself only denotes a political strategy. Since this thesis however distinguishes between the term post-truth and post-truth politics as elaborated on the previous pages, with the former describing the broader macrosocial condition currently witnessed and the latter delineating its practical materialization, the author will use Bufacchi's definition due to its accuracy, but modify it accordingly in order to use it as foundation for subsequent elaborations on post-truth politics:

*"Post-truth [politics]⁷¹ is a deliberate strategy aimed at creating an environment where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion, where theoretical frameworks are undermined in order to make it impossible for someone to make sense of a certain event, phenomenon, or experience, and where scientific truth is delegitimized."*⁷²

Based on this modified definition of post-truth politics, several contemporary political practices can be highlighted which are deliberately aiming on creating a post-truth environment. As the next pages will elaborate, the large extent of post-truth political practices in fact happen on a discursive level and therefore materialize as practices and forms of communication. In order to show how post-truth politics manifest and systematically demarcate what counts as post-truth politics, it is therefore crucial to examine existing and praxis-oriented research on discursive methods in the political communication of alleged post-truth actors.

⁷⁰ Bufacchi, Truth, lies and tweets: A Consensus Theory of Post-Truth, 2020, p. 3

⁷¹ Author's addition

⁷² Bufacchi, Truth, lies and tweets: A Consensus Theory of Post-Truth, 2020, p. 4

One of the most evident materializations of post-truth politics is the strategic employment of “deceptive communication” as described by Jason Harsin (2018). While this can take up different shades and forms, the most commonly encountered in the contemporary post-truth context are disinformation, fake news and rumor bombs. Disinformation is the deliberate proliferation of false or inaccurate information for strategic purposes, which can include old-fashioned lying, misstating or denying facts as well as fabricating falsehoods and half-lies.⁷³ Whereas these are all certainly inherent features of politics since centuries, the systematic approach to proliferating false statements has reached unprecedented proportions nowadays. Furthermore, when confronted with the truth and the exposure of a lie, actors who draw from post-truth strategies tend to respond either by ignoring the reveal or feigning ignorance, denying the lie was ever told, contesting the validity and objectivity of the factual counterclaims or attacking the personal integrity of the uncovering counterpart.

Not surprisingly, disinformation in a post-truth context often is far less about carefully and sophistically crafted falsehoods that try to evade exposure, and more about blatant and easily refutable lies. A prime example are Donald Trump’s statements about the size of the crowd or the weather at his inauguration, both of which were easily proven to be factually wrong. When confronted with the actual facts by the press, Trump’s key presidential advisors not only directed frontal attacks on them by alleging biased reporting but also termed a coin which became symbolic for post-truth dynamics in politics – “alternative facts”. Instead of admitting that the statements were factually wrong, those advisors suggested that facts can not only be interpreted differently, but remain valid when interpreted in a contradicting manner, which in turns erodes the very essence of a verifiable fact.⁷⁴ This shows how post-truth politicians attempt to evade the consequences of lying by simply contesting that there is a factual truth in the first place.

A related additional aspect of post-truth politics is the strategic proliferation and multiplication of narrative claims with the aim of creating confusion and doubt. Instead of establishing and presenting one dominant narrative, this obfuscation strategy entails a non-exhaustive chain of claims, sometimes even contradictory, which serve the only purpose of

⁷³ See Harsin, *Post-Truth and Critical Communication*, 2018, p. 9

⁷⁴ See Hendrick/Vestergaard, *Reality Lost. Markets of Attention, Misinformation and Manipulation*, 2019, p. 49ff.

drowning evidence-based counterclaims in a sea of narratives.⁷⁵ As Timothy Gibson (2018) elaborates, this practice is especially visible in the post-truth discourse regarding climate change denial, which does not consist of “one single narrative but rather an endless proliferation of shifting position”.⁷⁶, including the denial of the existence of climate change, the denial of human responsibility for climate change, the allegation that scientists are responsible for it and so on. A further rhetorical strategy of post-truth politics which is likewise very apparent in the current climate change debate can be described as “the politization of expertise”⁷⁷. By questioning the integrity of mainstream science and postulating it is inherently political, this post-truth strategy aims to delegitimize scientific knowledge and erode public trust into scientific institutions and experts. The frequent attacks on these traditional “gate-keepers” of truth, which range from accusations of personal and partisan bias to allegations of hidden agendas, can be viewed as post-truth political attempts to increase public distrust in the objectivity of science as a whole and decrease confidence in the scientific community.

Next to “alternative facts”, the term “fake news” is another popular buzzword that has entered public discourse in a post-truth context during the Trump Presidency. Essentially also a form of disinformation, “fake news” has become a general term referring to “intentionally fabricated and verifiable false news stories, that intend to mislead, misinform and influence the reader”⁷⁸ by pretending to be real news coverage and are “often characterized by a core falsehood surrounded by factual statements or details”.⁷⁹ Whereas the phenomenon itself is not inherently new, the uncontrolled circulation of false news stories especially on new media channels has increased considerably in the last decade and the deliberate proliferation of and repeated referral to fake news which aim to influence the public with falsehoods masqueraded as facts has become a crucial element in repertoires of political actors that operate with post-truth strategies. For example, news analyses and studies on the US-elections in 2016 not only demonstrated that during the run-up to the election false news stories were shared more often on social media platforms than mainstream news and voters on average were exposed to at least three fake news stories, but also that there were three times more fake news with pro-

⁷⁵ See Andrejevic, *Infoglut: How Too Much Information Is Changing the Way We Think and Know*, 2013, p. 6ff.

⁷⁶ See Gibson, *The Post-Truth Double Helix: Reflexivity and Mistrust in Local Politics*, 2018, p. 3174

⁷⁷ See *Ibid.*, p. 3177

⁷⁸ See Rodaro, *Populism, Social Media and the Dangers for Democracy*, 2020, p. 9

⁷⁹ See Harsin, *Post-Truth and Critical Communication*, 2018, p. 12

Trump or anti-Clinton content than vice versa.⁸⁰ Similarly, fake news dynamics also played a vital role during the Brexit-campaign of the Leave-camp in the months before the Referendum about Britain's future in the European Union.⁸¹

Substantially connected to the wide-spread proliferation of fake news is the significantly increased occurrence of so called “rumor bombs”, onto which fake news stories are often built upon. Deployed strategically as a weapon of political communication, rumor bombs are used by actors relying on post-truth practices to flood the news with “deliberately ambiguous or strategically polysemic claims to generate not just belief but conflict and disagreement or debate”, which in turn “produces confusion or disorientation” in the public debate.⁸² An example is how the unfounded claim about former President Barack Obama not being born in the US was repeatedly being used to “rumor bomb” the news agenda, de facto forcing him to release his birth certificate to the public at some point in an unprecedented turn of events.⁸³ Depending on the intensity and the broadness of their dissemination, single rumors can grow into full-blown conspiracy theories or become embedded in existing ones. Accordingly, the reliance on conspiracism is a frequently encountered strategy in post-truth politics to achieve political ends, discredit opponents as well to subvert fact- and evidence-based claims or policies and conspiracy-theoretical thinking is considerably facilitated in a post-truth context.⁸⁴

Unsurprisingly, the world witnessed an explosion of such activities by the hands of political actors on a global scale, from the United States where Trump inter alia insinuated that the Clintons were involved in the death of accused child-trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, to Brazil where President Jair Bolsonaro accused NGO's of setting fires in the Amazon without any evidence, or China, who blamed western agent provocateurs for the protests in Hong-Kong.⁸⁵ While these are only some examples on a long list of similar instances in recent years, the general societal trend of increased popularity of conspiracy-theoretical belief systems in the backdrop of post-truth developments becomes even more evident when looking at the

⁸⁰ See Silverman, *This Analysis Shows How Viral Fake Election News Stories Outperformed Real News On Facebook*, BuzzFeed.News, 2016; See Allcott/Gentzkow, *Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election*, 2017, p. 232

⁸¹ See King, *Education, digital literacy and democracy: the case of Britain's proposed 'exit' from the European Union (Brexit)*, 2019, p. 289

⁸² See Harsin, *Post-Truth and Critical Communication*, 2018, p. 11

⁸³ See *Ibid.*, p. 11

⁸⁴ See Gibson, *The Post-Truth Double Helix: Reflexivity and Mistrust in Local Politics*, 2018, p. 3178f.

⁸⁵ See Reuters, *Conspiracy theories risk becoming new currency of post-truth politics*, August 2019

globally connected and transnationally active conspiracy-network called QAnon. What started out of a discussion thread on the online forum 4chan about the conspiracy theory that the US is secretly controlled by a “Deep State” led by a pedophile elite from the government, media and private sector, quickly developed into the epicenter of contemporary conspiracy-fabrication and a popular brand under which millions of supporters worldwide rally around.⁸⁶

3.2.5. Post-Truth Identification Framework

Based on the previously established definition of and the practical elaborations on post-truth politics, a basic framework to identify post-truth strategies in political communication can be deduced. The goal of this framework is to provide the basis for a classification mechanism where rhetorical and discursive methods and practices aimed at creating or fostering a post-truth environment can be defined and highlighted as such. The framework consists of three main strategies with several sub-strategies and a column defining the main audience at which the respective post-truth strategy is targeted at.

The first main strategy is defined with the keyword “Deceptive Communication” and subsumes the proliferation of all forms of disinformation, fake news, rumor bombs and conspiracy theories as sub-strategies. The main audience that is targeted by this strategy is found on the level of individuals, comprising citizens in general and supporters of the respective post-truth actor in particular. The second main strategy is defined as “Delegitimization and politization of expertise” and comprises all forms of post-truth politics which are aiming to undermine peoples’ trust in traditional “gate-keepers of truth” such as scientific, social and political institutions by questioning their objectivity, impartiality and capability. The third main strategy identified is the multiplication and proliferation of narratives, which refers to the tangle of multifarious, incoherent and sometimes contradictory explanation patterns frequently employed by post-truth actors to obfuscate critical media coverage about an issue.

⁸⁶ See IESE Business School University of Navarra, How the post-truth world led to QAnon, September 2020

Table 1: Post-Truth Identification Framework

Main Strategy	Sub-Strategy	Targeted Audience
Deceptive communication	Disinformation	Individual citizens and supporters
	Fake News	
	Rumor Bombs	
	Conspiracy Theories	
Delegitimization and politization of expertise	Questioning objectivity	Political, scientific and social institutions and actors
	Questioning impartiality	
	Questioning capability	
Narrative Multiplication and Proliferation	Contradictory claims	Media Journalism
	Incoherent explanation patterns	

3.3. Framing Theory: Perspectives in Communication and Social Movement Studies

First popularized by Sociologist Henry Goffman in 1974, the concept of “frames” or “frameworks” refers to cognitive structures that function as signifiers or systems of classification in the perception and representation of reality.⁸⁷ Framing therefore is the way people structure, interpret and make meaning out of occurrences they encounter or in Goffman’s words, frames are basic “schemata of interpretation” that allow individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” individual or collective experiences.⁸⁸ The concept has been widely used and further developed in a variety of disciplines ranging from political science to psychology. For the purpose of the research scope, this thesis will mostly draw from the application and conceptualization of frame theory and analysis in communication and social movement studies. In the former, framing is foremost understood in terms of how reality is either intentionally or unconsciously represented and constructed through communication “in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation”.⁸⁹ Frames therefore can be defined as “organizing ideas or themes, ways of linking together stories historically, building up a narrative over time and across political space”⁹⁰.

From a communication studies perspective, frame analysis thus tries “to unpick the process through which a frame is presented”⁹¹ and what the underlying intentions of the respective framing could be. According to Robert Entman (1993), frames normally carry four functional components: the identification and definition of a problem, the identification and diagnosis of the problem’s causes, a moral judgment about these causes and suggestions for remedies.⁹² When conducting a frame analysis, these four elements can serve as guiding dimensions which offer insights on the structure and the purpose of a frame. Although Entman’s conceptualization of frames is derived from media studies and the analysis of news content, his approach still constitutes a valuable method of analyzing frames in other communication research. This thesis will therefore draw from Entman’s concept of the four functional elements of frames for the scope of its research and use it to structure the examination of the predominant frames in the samples of the FPÖ and AfD.

⁸⁷ See Kitzinger, *Framing and Frame Analysis*, 2007, p. 134f.

⁸⁸ Goffman, *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Reality*, 1974, p. 21

⁸⁹ Entmann, *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, 1993, p. 52

⁹⁰ Arowolo, *Understanding Framing Theory*, 2017, p. 2

⁹¹ Kitzinger, *Framing and Frame Analysis*, 2007, p. 134

⁹² See Entmann, *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, 1993, p. 52

In a similar fashion, social movement theorists have been highlighting the importance of frames and intentional framing processes for collective action and organization. According to the relevant literature, movements legitimize themselves, mobilize support and inspire action through constructing so called “Collective Action Frames” on specific issues. These Collective Action Frames serve as a point of identification for the movement’s followers and provide one or multiple narratives around which the movements mobilization discourse is structured. Whereas Collective Action Frames normally are issue- and movement-specific, they often derive from a more generic and broader frame, the so called “Master Frame”. Master Frames are wider in scope and therefore far more general and flexible, which allows movements to interpret or modify these frames in order to align them to their cause and deduce specific Collective Action Frames from them.⁹³

In their seminal work on framing processes and movement mobilization, Snow, Benford et al. (1986) have established the concept of “Frame Alignment” to explain how the “congruent and complimentary” linkage of an individual’s set of “interests, values and beliefs” with the “activities, goals and ideologies” of a social movement is a necessary condition for participation in the movement.⁹⁴ Four processes are subsequently identified with respect to the alignment of the individual’s and movement’s interpretative frameworks for the purpose of mobilization. The first and most prominent one, “Frame Bridging”, denotes the mechanism employed by movements to tap into the mobilization potential of an unorganized public sentiment pool by aligning “ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” primarily through “outreach and information diffusion”⁹⁵. “Frame Amplification” refers to the reinvigoration and validation of frames that are based on the target’s pre-existing values and beliefs, while “Frame Extension” relates to the strategic expansion of a movement’s primary framework with frames that are only circumstantial for the movement’s objective but prevalent among a targeted audience.⁹⁶ Lastly, “Frame Transformation” refers to the attempts of reframing existing interpretative patterns for the purpose of invoking a rather radical change in the target’s perception.⁹⁷

⁹³ See Vicari, *Measuring collective action frames: A linguistic approach to frame analysis*, 2010, p. 506f.

⁹⁴ Snow/Benford/Rochford/Worden, *Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation*, 1986, p. 464

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 467f.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 469ff.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 473f.

4. Design and Methodology

4.1. Research Strategy

After having established the theoretical framework in the previous chapters by elaborating on the different approaches in defining populism and investigating its specific right-wing form, by examining the concept of post-truth and its practical manifestations as well as by presenting the perspectives on framing theory in communication and social movement studies, a sound conceptual foundation is laid to empirically analyze to what extent the political communication of right-wing populists in Europe makes use of post-truth claims for the purpose of political mobilization in the context of the COVID-19-crisis. For the purpose of narrowing down the scope of this thesis and providing more tangible results on the matter, the analytical focus of the research is set on two specific cases of contemporary European right-wing populism, namely the Freedom Party in Austria (FPÖ) and the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany (AfD). To analyze the two cases in question, the research strategy relies on a qualitative methodology structured into two parts. The first part centers on identifying to what degree the FPÖ and AfD rely on a post-truth discourse in their communication by applying the previously established framework for post-truth identification on a pre-defined sample consisting of Facebook posts from the two parties in a two-month timeframe, which accordingly will be examined in regard to a potential post-truth substance. In the second part, the content of all posts in which a post-truth substance was detected is further analyzed through a frame analysis to investigate any underlying discursive strategies, with a special focus given on potential elements aimed at political mobilization. By combining the results of both methodological steps

4.2. Case Selection

As leading exponents of a European right-wing populism based on nationalism and ethno-centrism as well as overt islamophobia, the Austrian Freedom Party or Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ) and the Alternative for Germany or Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) were selected as main cases for the present study due to their close political affinity and geographical proximity. Even though the FPÖ can look back at a considerably longer party history than the AfD, both parties share a similar development path in gradually embracing a right-wing populist ideological alignment mainly focused on the topic of migration as cornerstone of their political agenda. It is therefore not without reason, that the FPÖ has been frequently recognized by political commentators and analysts for functioning as a blueprint

for the AfD in terms of its political strategy and conduct, which already indicates a valid comparability of the two selected cases.⁹⁸

As elaborated in more detail in the historical overview on the FPÖ and AfD in the next chapter, the transition towards right-wing populism was accompanied in both parties by a secession of the parties' liberal factions and a subsequent continuous radicalization of the remaining part. This radicalization is not only reflected in the relations of both the FPÖ and the AfD to the extreme right in their respective countries, but also in the repeated formulation of congruent political claims and the growing influence of far-right and anti-democratic forces within the parties. Whereas the extremist-right always had a rather prominent place in the ranks of the FPÖ, not least due to the historical connection of the party with the Austrian national-socialist past, the AfD only started to take up a more radical course after its founder, Bernd Lucke, left the party in 2015. The assimilation and orientation towards their successful neighboring right-wing populist party in Austria, which followed the change in leadership and which representatives of the AfD have repeatedly emphasized in the past, not only resulted in the alignment of their rightist political agendas, but also in the attempt of the AfD to emulate the FPÖ's profile as agent of the under-privileged socio-economic classes. Both parties however find themselves in the political predicament of wanting to expand their electorate through a more pragmatic course to gain political influence on the one hand and having to satisfy their far-right core supporters through a further radicalization of the parties' political agenda and communication on the other hand.

The evident comparability generated by the described intersections in the past political conduct of both parties becomes especially significant when analyzing their responses and reactions to certain aspects of external political phenomena like the COVID-19-crisis. While a more detailed outline of the political conduct of the FPÖ and AfD during the pandemic will be provided in the subsequent chapter, the following overlaps in the responses and reactions of both parties to the global health crisis are already mentioned at this point to further substantiate the validity of a comparison. Especially the intra-party split between radical and moderate factions has become increasingly visible during the COVID-19 crisis, where both parties have been struggling to agree on a clear strategy on how to approach the implications of the pandemic. Whereas representatives from the FPÖ and the AfD were among the first

⁹⁸ See Profil, Deutschland: Wie viel FPÖ steckt in der Rechtspartei AfD?, May 2018; See RP-Online, AfD und FPÖ in Düsseldorf - Treffen unter Freunden, February 2016

politicians in Germany and Austria to vehemently call for a strict domestic lockdown for health-related safety reasons right at the beginning of the pandemic, both parties have embarked on a complete opposite course since then and embraced an overall skeptical attitude towards the danger of the virus, the benefits of safety regulations and everything else which is COVID-19-related as the pandemic progressed. While some voices of reason who acknowledge both the dangerous epistemological situation Austria and Germany have been facing since March 2020 and the necessity for governmental interference might still exist in the parties ranks, most parts of the FPÖ and the AfD have largely focused their political strategies on downplaying or denying any of it and positioning themselves as the main COVID-19-skeptical party in their respective countries, setting their sight on appealing to the increasing number of citizens that are frustrated and angry with the government and the continuing mitigation measures. These evident similarities in the recent political conduct of both parties during the pandemic legitimately reinforce the preexisting comparability and compatibility of the FPÖ and AfD and constitute a valid foundation for the analytical scope of this thesis.

4.3. Sample Selection

The official Facebook pages of both parties were chosen as main sample sources, where posts were harvested in-between a 2-month timeframe from February 1st to March 31st, 2021. The timeframe was selected to reach a balance between the feasibility of the research and the significance of the findings in the scope of this thesis. The decision to focus solely on Facebook for sourcing the samples was taken on the one hand due to the Social Network platform being verifiably the most important online tool for right-wing populists strategic communication,⁹⁹ and on the other hand due to the communicative infrastructure of Facebook, which allows for substantive textual content to be posted, being particularly suitable for the analytical scope of this thesis, especially in comparison to platforms like Twitter, which has a limited character count for tweets, or Instagram, which is mainly based on images. Since all posts in the sample are composed in German, all quoted or cited extracts of the posts in this thesis were translated into English.

⁹⁹ See Politico, “Why the right wing has a massive advantage on Facebook”, September 2020; See Süddeutsche Zeitung, “Warum Europas Populisten Facebook lieben - und was in den USA anders ist”, January 2019; See taz, “Populisten-Hochburg Facebook: Teile und herrsche”, October 2020

The Facebook pages were scanned manually for all official posts relating to the COVID-19-pandemic in the set timeframe. For practical reasons, the criteria about what constitutes a relation to the COVID-19-pandemic was defined rather broad beforehand and centered on the content of the posts. A post therefore became eligible as long as it addressed some aspect, implication or consequence of the current pandemic-situation irrespective of the context. The sample thus includes different forms of posts addressing a variety of pandemic-related topics, such as crisis management, mitigation measures or vaccination issues. Basic re-posts, which are posts that originally were posted on a different page (e.g., on the Facebook pages of the party representatives) and have been additionally posted again on the main pages of the FPÖ, without any ancillary content contribution from the pages analyzed have been excluded from the samples in order to follow the previously defined scope of the research. Furthermore, as it was mostly the case on the Facebook page of the FPÖ, some posts that were identical content-wise (e.g., an announcement post of an event and the subsequent post about the event) have also been excluded to avoid any distortion by duplication.

According to this manual procedure, a total of 64 eligible posts were found - 29 in February and 35 in March – on the official Facebook page of the AfD. In the same time span, a total of 155 eligible post were detected on the FPÖ Facebook page – 71 in February and 84 in March. By putting these numbers into relation with the totality of posts shared on the pages in this timeframe, which amounts to 91 overall on the AfD page (70%) and 168 overall on the FPÖ page (92%), a significant importance of pandemic-related content for the communication of both parties can already be identified. While it must be noted that the pandemic-related focus of the Facebook communication of the parties may also be influenced by a scarcity of other relevant topics on the general domestic political agenda, the visible emphasis on issues concerning COVID-19 of especially the FPÖ certainly is also partly resulting from a strategic desire to make political capital out of the current circumstances. This in turn already validates the overall academic interest of this thesis in discursive strategies of right-wing populists and their political communication regarding the current pandemic.

5. Research Background

5.1. COVID-19 Pandemic: A post-truth nightmare and right-wing populist's dream

The global outbreak of the COVID-19-pandemic in March 2020 seems to have considerably intensified post-truth dynamics around the world. Already the beginning of the pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the current health crisis is accompanied by an “infodemic” – an unprecedented explosion of COVID19-related mis- and disinformation, rumors and conspiracy theories which are spreading like a wildfire especially in the online environment and seriously threatening governmental efforts to contain the pandemic.¹⁰⁰ This included inter alia misleading claims about the severity of the disease and potential treatments, xenophobe conspiracy-theories about the origin of the virus and disinformation regarding the utility and purpose of lockdowns and other health measures. Over the course of the COVID-19-crisis, these dynamics have only intensified and are continuing to fuel uncertainty and distrust towards governmental as well as medical authorities, with less and less people adhering to the implemented safety measures.

5.1.1. Right-wing Populists and domestic mitigation measures

Right-wing populist have been eager to exploit the current crisis and the climate of increased public doubt and anxiety for their own gain, especially in countries where they are in opposition. By resorting to practices of post-truth politics, right-wing populist actors are at the forefront of the “infodemic” and considerably contribute to the widespread proliferation of pandemic-related lies, rumors, and myths.¹⁰¹ At the beginning, most of them were downplaying the pandemic (Trump, Bolsonaro) or scapegoating immigrants and foreigners for the spread of the virus (Salvini). Especially the former strategy proved to be extremely destructive on a domestic level, with many of the countries with a right-wing populist government having to mourn staggering death tolls due to evident maladministration.¹⁰² As the pandemic progresses, right-wing populists seem to predominantly resort to criticizing and questioning COVID-19-mitigation measures, slandering scientific institutions and experts as well as vilifying the government. The prevalent narrative of right-wing populist parties situated in an opposition context centers on further strengthening the societal divide emerging

¹⁰⁰ See WHO, Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation, 2020

¹⁰¹ See Boberg/Quandt/Schatko-Eckrodt/Frichlisch, Pandemic Populism: Facebook Pages of Alternative News Media and the Corona Crisis, 2020, p2f.

¹⁰² See Katsambekis /Stavrakakis, Populism and the Pandemic. A Collaborative Report, 2020

from the crisis by fostering distrust among the public against the meaningfulness and effectiveness of government measures.

While the responses of authorities on a domestic level differed to some degree at the beginning of the crisis, with some governments initially relying on a more relaxed course unsuccessfully aiming to achieve herd immunity, most countries eventually accepted the scarcity of options to effectively counter the spread of the virus and adjusted their mitigation strategy by taking up a more restrictive direction. Especially in a European context this meant first and foremost shutting down all public life by implementing a so called “lockdown” in an effort to drastically reduce social contacts as well as subsequently easing and tightening the restrictions depending on national infection levels as the pandemic progressed. Differing according to country, this government intervention includes the closing of educational institutions, businesses, offices, and the gastronomy, prohibiting or restricting private and commercial gatherings as well as introducing curfews and stay-at-home orders. In practice, lockdowns have proven to be an effective tool to reduce COVID-19-incidence and mortality rates and stabilize health systems that have become increasingly overstrained due to the pandemic.¹⁰³

However, lockdowns also carry far-reaching implications on an economic, social and political level. As research shows, negative side-effects of these highly restrictive and intrusive measures not only include evident socio-economic consequences like income and job loss or educational deficiencies, all of which may result in increased inequality. The unfamiliar and paradoxical living condition also has severe detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of affected people due to postponed medical treatments, forced social isolation, a loss of self-determination and a lack of coping possibilities, all of which can result in heighten distress, anxiety, depression and traumata as well as dysfunctional and substance-abusing lifestyles.¹⁰⁴ Governments therefore rely on a lockdown only as an ultima ratio in their mitigation strategy, onto which they have to fall back on when the domestic pandemic situation becomes uncontrollable. However, since there is no other measure with a similar effectiveness in terms of countering the virus spread and the epidemiological situation developed dynamically in waves over the course of 2020, with many European countries being hit by another dramatic surge in infections during the so called “second” COVID-19-

¹⁰³ See Haug et. al., Ranking the effectiveness of worldwide COVID-19 government interventions, 2020

¹⁰⁴ See Schippers, For the Greater Good? The Devastating Ripple Effects of the Covid-19 Crisis, 2020

wave in fall of the same year after successfully managing to lower the figures over the summer in 2020, many people in Europe found themselves living in multiple lockdowns for a prolonged period of time since the outbreak of the pandemic. Without any valid alternatives left, many European governments have been forced to rely on a seemingly endless cycle of entering and exiting lockdowns in their quest to stop a further spread of the virus or at least to slow it down until a nationwide vaccination program is successfully implemented.

5.1.2. Public protest dynamics and the “infodemic”

While this race against the clock would necessitate a continuously high degree of civil cooperation in upholding the measures like distance-regulations or compulsory mask wearing, a growing dissatisfaction with the governmental handlings of this crisis has become visible in the population of many European countries since summer 2020, resulting in an ongoing series of protests and demonstrations that bring together participants from a wide-ranging political and social spectrum. These dynamics are particularly salient in Germany and Austria, where both the frequency of protests against government measures and the number of participants has increased substantially in the final months of 2020 and the first half of 2021. In this timeframe, the two German-speaking countries experienced a wave of public protests across many major cities, which were attended by thousands of people and often were accompanied by increased civil disobedience against COVID-19-mitigation measures and sometimes even incidents of violence.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, entire movements have formed over the summer 2020 in both countries that take ownership of the protests, organize themselves in regional branches and manage to mobilize an increasing number of people through social media channels. As research has shown, these movements have mainly been driven by far-right groups and rely heavily on a conspiracy-theoretical discourse and the deliberate spread of disinformation to nurture and foster anti-government sentiments.¹⁰⁶ This applies in particular to the most prominent one among them, which calls itself the “Querdenker”-movement. Due to its leading role in the organization of most German protests, its name has become the epitome of the entire protest scene in both countries and people rally around the meaning of the term “querdenken”, which can be translated into “thinking outside the box” or “thinking different than the mainstream”.

¹⁰⁵ See Deutschlandfunk, „Querdenker sorgen für Streit zwischen Behörden“, April 2021

¹⁰⁶ See Ariza, *From the Fringes to the Forefront. How far-right movements across the globe have reacted to Covid-19*, 2020, p. 6

Two mentionable sociological studies on the protests in Germany have been conducted in 2020, which give valuable insights into the “Querdenker”-scene by providing an image of the predominant attitudes and opinions among people protesting COVID-19-measures. In demographic terms, the scene is relatively heterogenous and consists of individuals from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. While people from the entire political spectrum have been found to attend the protests, a sizeable and often very prominent part of the protestors consist of individuals with openly right-wing attitudes, some of them with connections to the far-right and Neo-Nazi scene. It is therefore unsurprising, that both studies point to a significant potential for radicalization in the scene, which is amplified with general attitudes among protesters seeming to gradually shift farther to the right with each passing month in the progressing pandemic.¹⁰⁷

As Nachtwey et al. (2020) have depicted in their study, the great majority of protestors are united in the beliefs, that the entire pandemic is just scaremongering due to the COVID-19-virus being less dangerous than proclaimed and rather similar to an ordinary flue, that mitigation measures like compulsory mask-wearing or vaccination programs have detrimental health implication and that governmental restrictions are limiting fundamental freedoms and can be considered a first step into a progressing authoritarianism.¹⁰⁸ These three central opinions prevalent among protesters are accompanied by a general alienation and distrust towards established institutions of the liberal-democratic political system and traditional media as well as a deeply rooted conspiracy-theoretical mentality.¹⁰⁹ It therefore stands to reason, that the “Querdenker”-scene has considerable mobilization potential for right-wing populist parties in the countries affected by these accelerating dynamics of public protest due to the shared anti-elitist, anti-mainstream and anti-establishment attitudes, the prominence of opinion-based counter-knowledge and conspiracism as well as the general political propinquity to radical-rightist thinking and ideas.

5.2. COVID-19 and Right-Wing Populism in Austria and Germany

The evident salience of the “Querdenker”-scene in Germany and Austria as well as the high frequency of protests against COVID-19-mitigations measures in both countries warrants a

¹⁰⁷ See Nachtwey/Schäfer/Frei, *Politische Soziologie der Corona-Protteste*, 2020, p. 54; See Pantenburg/Reichardt/Sepp, *Corona-Protteste und das (Gegen-) Wissen sozialer Bewegungen*, 2021, p. 9

¹⁰⁸ See Nachtwey/Schäfer/Frei, *Politische Soziologie der Corona-Protteste*, 2020, p. 3f.

¹⁰⁹ See Pantenburg/Reichardt/Sepp, *Corona-Protteste und das (Gegen-) Wissen sozialer Bewegungen*, 2021, p. 52ff.

closer look at the political conduct during the COVID-19 crisis of the respective national right-wing populist parties, namely the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Whereas the FPÖ is one of the elder members of the European right-wing populist party family and can look back on a decade-long organizational history with multiple transformative moments in regard to ideological alignment and public appearance as well as several terms in Austrian federal and regional government – all of which has already been extensively studied, analyses and discussed in previous academic research –, the AfD has only rather recently entered the spotlight of domestic politics in Germany with its founding year in 2013. On the following pages, this thesis will shortly touch upon the history and ideology as well as on successes and failures of both parties in order to provide a comprehensive overview on the two cases this thesis is focusing on before moving on to showcasing the similarities and differences in their conduct during the COVID-19 crisis.

5.2.1. The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)

Officially founded in 1956, the FPÖ emerged out of the remnants of Austria's national-socialist past and functioned to a large extent as a party-political repository for former members of the NSDAP. In its self-perception it was initially representing the intellectual tradition of a transboundary German-nationalism, which rejected the idea of an independent Austrian Republic and subsequent national identity while believing in a Greater German cultural community where the country was part of. It was therefore characterized as representing the so called "Third Camp" or "Dritte Lager" in Austria, which was next to the Socialist Party and the Christian-Social Party the third-largest political camp in the polarized political landscape of the country.¹¹⁰ Up until the 1970's, this ideological localization seriously impeded the party's coalition capabilities and any possibility for government participation. The liberal wing in the FPÖ therefore (successfully) tried to shift the party to the political center and cleanse it from its far-right, German-nationalist elements, resulting in government participation at the beginning of the 1980's. This ideological liberalization however found its end when Jörg Haider came to power in 1986, who charted on a diametrical path in his attempt to maximize voters and introduced a sharp turn to right-wing populism, getting in line with a larger emerging dynamic across Europe.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ See Frölich-Steffen, *Die Identitätspolitik der FPÖ: vom Deutschnationalismus zum Österreich-Patriotismus*, 2004, p. 284ff.

¹¹¹ See Pelinka, *Die FPÖ in der vergleichenden Parteienforschung: zur typologischen Einordnung der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs*, 2002, p. 287f.

The infamous political figure of Haider certainly had an immeasurable and lasting impact on the political scene in Austria and a detailed academic analysis of his persona, his politics and his influence would not only occupy all of the pages of this thesis but could fill entire books (which has been done in abundance). What must be mentioned here however is Haider's personalistic leadership style and offbeat communication strategy as well as his successful political synthesis of populist elements with a far-right ideology, all of which laid the foundation for how the party subsequently developed. Supported by his evident charisma, Haider had a firm grip on the party and under his leadership, the FPÖ's public appearance revolved solely around him, making him the impersonation of the party's cause and main point of identification for its followers. A key feature of his political strategy was to create an image of himself as an antithesis to the political establishment, as "a man of the people", by emphasizing his closeness to the citizens in his daily conduct. Moreover, by introducing elements of social and welfare policy in the party's programmatic focus he was able to increase the FPÖ's appeal in the working class, the traditional and for a long-time undisputed electorate of the Social-Democratic Party.¹¹²

Ideologically, Haider attempted to substitute the German-nationalism in the ranks of the FPÖ gradually with an Austrian national-patriotism based on anti-multiculturalism, anti-europeanism and anti-immigration-politics, which up until now are a key feature of the FPÖ's program.¹¹³ However, he never made a secret out of his and the party's ideological vicinity to national-socialist thinking, which frequently became evident in his rhetoric through latent antisemitic escapades as well as outright Nazi-relativism.¹¹⁴ For the proliferation of the party's ideology, Haider relied heavily on a populist discourse and rhetoric fueled with emotional appeals and far-right ingredients such as ethnocentrism and blatant racism.¹¹⁵ The new right-wing populist strategy of Haider bore fruit for the FPÖ with a massive increase in votes in the final decade of the last century, catapulting the party on the 2nd place in the national elections in 2000 and making way for a government coalition with the ÖVP.

The culmination of Haider's electoral success however was soon to be tainted not only by the ensuing international condemnation of the new Austrian coalition due to the FPÖ's evident failure to refrain from national-socialist ideology, but also because of the party's involvement

¹¹² See Beyer/Pühringer, *Freiheitliche Flügelkämpfe? (Historische) Konfliktlinien in der FPÖ*, 2018, p. 21f.

¹¹³ See Gärtner, *Racism in the Haider Era*, 2002, 17f.

¹¹⁴ See Manoschek, *FPÖ, ÖVP and Austria's Nazi Past*, 2002, p. 5ff.

¹¹⁵ See Gärtner, *Racism in the Haider Era*, 2002, p. 27f.

in one of the most infamous corruption scandals of the 2nd Republic as well as intensifying disputes within the party and the subsequent internal fragmentation. Thus, when Heinz-Christian Strache took over as leader of the party in the mid-2000s, the FPÖ was in tatters and its share in votes substantially diminished. Over the span of a bit more than decade however, Strache managed to lead the party back towards former strength and into government once again at the federal elections of 2017. Strache sharpened the right-wing populist profile of the party which was previously introduced by Haider and successfully positioned himself as the undisputed frontrunner of the FPÖ. Under his leadership, the FPÖ focused much of its political program around the topics of anti-immigration and anti-Muslimism, which were increasingly emphasized in a socioeconomic context. Issues regarding welfare policy were hereby discursively connected to the topic of migration by relying on the xenophobic narrative of the undeserving immigrant exploiting the Austrian welfare system to live a life of luxury financed by tax money from the hard-working Austrian population. Strache was thus able to expand his and the party's support in the working class, stealing significant numbers of voters from the social-democrats and establishing the FPÖ as main force in this electorate.¹¹⁶

Even more than under Haider, the FPÖ under Strache strongly reconnected with its far-right and German-nationalist past, at least underneath the surface of its public appearance. Much of its ranks, including Strache and the majority of the other leading party representatives, were recruited from traditional right-wing fraternities, which have a history of being repeatedly scrutinized in public for their close ideological and personnel connections to the extremist-right and Neo-Nazi scene. The resulting ideological vicinity of the FPÖ to right-wing extremism in all its forms has led to numerous scandals whenever it has come to the surface. There are countless instances where verbal slip-ups of FPÖ-politicians revealed extreme-right positions or where their personal connections to leading heads of the Neo-Nazi scene leaked to the public. However, as Wodak (2018) argues, there is a visible difference in the party's "backstage agenda" and its "frontstage performance and policies".¹¹⁷ The FPÖ's strategy hereby is to soften the extreme-right ideologies in their public appearances and resorting to a "banal nationalism", while promoting a far more extremist agenda "behind closed doors" in

¹¹⁶ See Beyer/Pühringer, *Freiheitliche Flügelkämpfe? (Historische) Konfliktlinien in der FPÖ*, 2018, p. 22

¹¹⁷ See Wodak, *The micro-politics of right-wing populism*, 2018, p. 16

an attempt to strike a balance between their need to address the FPÖ's evident far-right core clientele and their desire to become a catch-all party.¹¹⁸

After the FPÖ enjoyed significant electoral gains at the federal election in 2017, the party reentered into a government coalition with the ÖVP, which proved to be short-lived once again with the breaking of the Ibiza-video in May 2019. In the video, Strache, who was Vice-Chancellor and at the height of his power when the video broke, was secretly taped together with the speaker of the FPÖ parliamentary faction, Johan Gudenus, two years earlier *inter alia* discussing alleged illegal party financing of the FPÖ as well as suggesting corrupt practices regarding public contracts and tenders. Confronted with the affair, the fallen-from-grace party leader and his protégé Gudenus had no other option as to resign, breaking up the coalition in the process of it.¹¹⁹ Despite the scandal, the party managed to achieve a solid 17% at the EU elections in the same year and continued to have considerable electoral potential even though it had to face major losses in the federal snap-elections and the Viennese elections. With its new dual leadership constellation, consisting of former presidential candidate and Transport Minister Norbert Hofer as official head of the party and former Interior Minister Herbert Kickl as head of the parliamentary faction, the FPÖ moved away from its traditional personalistic leadership structure in a quest to regain strength and fully embraced the strategy of balancing extremist and populist right-wing politics. Whereas the rather soft-spoken Hofer with his exaggerating friendly and courteous manner appeals to the broad mass of conservative mainstream voters, the controversial hardliner Kickl with his overtly xenophobic demeanor and inflammatory rhetoric resonates well with the party's radical right-wing electorate.¹²⁰

5.2.2. The German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)

The AfD was formed in the run-up to the German federal elections in 2013 out of the loose civil alliance "Bündnis Bürgerwille", a bipartisan movement consisting of former members of the Christliche Union Deutschland (CDU) and the Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP) as well as nationalist and Christian-fundamentalists groups. Whereas now it counts as the first right-wing party that successfully established itself on a nationwide level in the history of the German Republic, its founding premise was largely based on liberal-conservative values and

¹¹⁸ See Wodak, *The micro-politics of right-wing populism*, 2018, p. 17f.

¹¹⁹ See Özkececi, *The Ibiza Video as an example of today's Media Functions between Investigative Journalism and Political Influence*, 2019, p. 435ff.

¹²⁰ See Csanyi, *The 2019 Parliamentary Election in Austria*, 2019, p. 141

a shared eurocriticism which evolved out of a response to the Eurocrisis in 2010, the subsequent introduction of the European Stability Mechanism and especially Chancellor Angela Merkel's approval of EU financial aid in the Greek debt crisis. Accordingly, the political program of the AfD in this initial phase revolved mainly around a general criticism of the EU, the monetary union and Merkel's foreign politics. Contrary to public perception however, an ideological orientation to the right was an essential element of the AfD even at the beginning, with a nationalist-xenophobic political wing of the party already crystalizing at this point and internally gaining strength especially across the regional branches of the party in Eastern-Germany.¹²¹ A driving force behind the founding of the party was Bernd Lucke, an eurosceptic university professor of macroeconomics from Hamburg, who subsequently headed the AfD together with the conservative journalist Konrad Adam and entrepreneur Frauke Petry. The party narrowly missed the entry into parliament at the federal elections in 2013 but triumphed at the European elections a year later when it reached 7,1 percentage in the share of votes, consequently winning seven seats in the European parliament.¹²²

The electoral success of the predominantly nationalist-xenophobic, eastern-German branches of the AfD at the regional elections in 2014 can be seen as the starting point of the intra-party leadership struggles resulting in a general ideological reorientation of the AfD to the radical-populist right. This dynamic picked up additional speed with the emergence of the Islamophobic PEGIDA-movement and their public protests the same year, which were met with approval and support from the radical-right wing of the AfD, and even more through the outbreak of the European migration crisis in 2015, which made the topic of immigration a dominant issue in the public discourse and lead to the leadership and moderate liberal-conservative course of Lucke being openly and successfully challenged by Petry with support from the nationalist-xenophobic political wing of the party.¹²³ In response, Lucke and the majority of the liberal-conservative wing separated from the party, leaving the right-wing forces in charge and sealing the future path of the AfD in fully embracing a right-wing populist profile.

In the following years, the AfD's political focus was largely set on the immigration debate and the party's rhetoric started to rely more heavily on key populist elements to shape the

¹²¹ See Häusler, *Die AfD: Partei des völkisch-autoritären Populismus*, 2018, p. 10

¹²² See Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Etappen der Parteigeschichte der AfD*, October 2020.

¹²³ See Häusler, *Die AfD: Partei des völkisch-autoritären Populismus*, 2018, p. 11

AfD's self-identification as movement representing the German people. Their newfound radical-right populist discourse was predominantly based on a clear ethno-cultural reductionism in the conceptualization of "the people" which excluded non-native Germans, Muslims, migrants and minorities of any kind.¹²⁴ In their people-centric referral, the AfD increasingly emphasized a presupposed German identity which borrowed in part heavily from national-socialist nativist thinking and was ought to be protected from an occurring "islamisation" of the country brought about by unrestricted immigration and the subsequent cultural takeover by the hands of migrants and other minorities. The declared main enemy of the party remained Merkel, who stood as a symbol for the denounced left-progressive, elitist, and pro-immigrant "do-gooder" society which was accused in the party's rhetoric of destroying the very essence of the country by turning it into a multicultural melting pot. Its newfound radical right-wing populist image was not short of authoritarian tendencies becoming increasingly evident by the party's repeated rapprochements to and discursive alignment with anti-democratic and extremist movements like PEGIDA or the "Identitäre Bewegung", which in turn established the party more and more as political repository for the far-right in Germany.¹²⁵

The new political orientation of the party was at first bearing fruit and led to rocketing approval ratings and further success at regional elections, this time also in Western-Germany, which in part was also due to the worsening political climate in the population in regard to migrants and Muslims resulting from the series of Islamist terrorist attacks striking many European capitals, including Berlin, from 2015 to 2017.¹²⁶ Against the backdrop of its successes, the AfD increasingly put out its feelers to other right-wing populist parties in Europe and this effort was especially acknowledged by kindred spirits in close geographic proximity, namely the FPÖ. This certainly was in the interest of AfD-leader Petry, who saw in her party's Austrian counterpart a role-model and blueprint for the future development of the AfD, particularly in regard to the FPÖ successful programmatic combination of anti-immigration and socioeconomic claims. From 2016 onwards, the two parties started a close collaboration, consisting mainly of media-savvy reciprocal visits and culminating in their mutual participation in the pan-European electoral alliance of populist-right parties named "European Alliance of Peoples and Nations", which formed in the run-up to the European

¹²⁴ See Kim, *The populism of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): an extended Essex School perspective*, 2017, p. 7

¹²⁵ See Häusler, *Die AfD: Partei des völkisch-autoritären Populismus*, 2018, p. 12

¹²⁶ See Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Etappen der Parteigeschichte der AfD*, October 2020.

elections of 2019 and included next to the FPÖ and the AfD inter alia the French Front National and the Italian Lega Nord.¹²⁷

During the last years, the progressing radicalization within the party soon reached levels which threatened the principally still democratic appearance of the party and ceased to be publicly tenable. Several key party representatives were taking up increasingly right-wing extremist standpoints and openly showcasing antisemitic and NS-revisionist opinions as well as maintaining contacts to the prohibited Nazi-successor party NPD. The spearhead of this intra-party development is the influential leader and co-founder of the AfD branch in Thüringen, Björn Höcke, who is considered a hardline right-wing extremist and has been promoting the party's swing to the radical-right from the beginning. The factional infighting caused by this development led to the resignation of Petry in 2017, who unsuccessfully attempted to push a more pragmatic party course aimed at a possible federal government participation. The ideological intra-party quarrels still continue to persist under the current leadership of EU-parliamentarian Jörg Meuthen, who has not yet managed to balance the differing right-wing attitudes in the party and counter the prevalent disunity in the AfD.¹²⁸

5.2.3. Politics of the FPÖ and AfD in times of the COVID19-Pandemic

With the outbreak of the COVID-19-pandemic and the breakdown of the Schengen System in Europe, the AfD saw itself confronted with the fulfillment of their core demands for a more restrictive border policy and a stop to immigration. However, as political commentators have noted, the pandemic initially also deprived the party of much of its appeal by effectively pushing their main topic, immigration, into the background of the public debate and making much of the AfD's claims obsolete.¹²⁹ Further detrimental to the party's cause was the general public support for the German government's response and Merkel's pandemic-management at the beginning of the crisis as well as the difficulties the party faced to establish a uniform and comprehensive strategy in approaching the pandemic stemming from the ideological split in the party between radicals and moderates which also revealed itself in the question on how to handle the COVID-19-situation. Whereas at first the party criticized Merkel for not responding fast and vigorously enough to the outbreak, the German right-wing populists later focused on criticizing the government policies and measures as too harsh and authoritarian as

¹²⁷ See RP-Online, AfD und FPÖ in Düsseldorf - Treffen unter Freunden, February 2016; See Europe Elects, European Alliance of Peoples and Nations: What we know so far, April 2019

¹²⁸ See Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Etappen der Parteigeschichte der AfD, October 2020

¹²⁹ See Katsambekis /Stavrakakis, Populism and the Pandemic. A Collaborative Report, 2020, p. 24

the pandemic progressed. In the backdrop of the growing public disenchantment, frustration and anger towards the German government and the persisting restrictions to mitigate the pandemic, the AfD fully embraced its role as “Anti-Corona” party in the second half of 2020 by taking up a fundamental opposition to the entirety of the German government’s crisis management and concentrating large parts of their political agenda on denouncing safety measures and public restrictions like lockdowns and strongly supporting the nationwide COVID-19-protests.¹³⁰

The FPÖ faced similar problems since the outbreak of the COVID-19-pandemic due to a great share of societal issues that previously dictated the domestic public debate being suddenly sidelined. This included the topic of immigration, which always has been a cornerstone of the FPÖ’s political agenda.¹³¹ Whereas the double-leadership structure has seemed to function relatively well at the beginning, it has been gradually strained and put through a test during the COVID-19-crisis. Although some representatives of the party were among the first politician to call for a lockdown of the country in March 2020, the FPÖ soon started to criticize aspects of the government’s handling of the crisis and progressively adapted a COVID-19-skeptical course. As the pandemic progressed, two different factions in the party crystalized regarding how the FPÖ should approach the implications of the crisis. The debate mainly revolves around the questions, if party representatives should support governmental safety restrictions and adhere to them, for example compulsory mask wearing, and more importantly, how the party should position itself towards the public protests against COVID-19-measures in the country. The underlying issue of this factional division however seems to be a gradually developing and intensifying ideological conflict between the radical right-wing populist course of Kickl and Hofer’s more moderate approach aimed at government participation.¹³²

¹³⁰ See Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die AfD und das Virus, April 2021

¹³¹ See Wiener Zeitung, „Corona ist die neue Nische der FPÖ“, March 2021

¹³² See Profil, „Freiheitliche Corona-Politik: Blaues Bangen“, March 2021

6. Pandemic Post-Truth Framing of the FPÖ and AfD

6.1. Part 1: Identification of Post-Truth claims

After having collected and identified the sample according to the previously described pandemic-related criteria, the entire 219 posts were examined regarding a potential post-truth substance in order to analyze to what extent the AfD and FPÖ employ post-truth claims and strategies in their pandemic-related political communication. For this purpose, the previously established Post-Truth Identification Framework (Chapter 3.2.5) was employed and the selected sample analyzed accordingly. To operationalize the framework, the respective categories and sub-categories have been assigned a Code consisting of letters and numbers. The codes for the Main Strategies are defined as MS (=Main Strategy) plus the respective number on a scale from one to three (eg. MS1). The codes of the Sub-Strategies consist of the respective initials and numbers of the Main Strategies plus the defined abbreviation of the category SS (=Sub-Strategy) and a number from one to four depending on the order of appearance in the framework (eg. MS1.SS2).

Table 2: Post-Truth Identification Framework (Modified/Operationalized)

Main Strategy	Sub-Strategy	Targeted Audience
Deceptive communication (MS1)	Disinformation (MS1.SS1)	Individual citizens and supporters
	Fake News (MS1.SS2)	
	Rumor Bombs (MS1.SS3)	
	Conspiracy Theories (MS1.SS4)	
Delegitimization and politization of expertise	Questioning objectivity (MS2.SS1)	Political, scientific and social institutions and actors
	Questioning impartiality (MS2.SS2)	

(MS2)	Questioning capability (MS2.SS3)	
Narrative Multiplication and Proliferation (MS3)	Contradictory claims (MS3.SS1)	Media Journalism
	Incoherent explanation patterns (MS3.SS2)	

6.1.1. Results and Discussion

By applying the Post-Truth Identification Framework, each of the 219 posts was manually investigated and subsequently assigned a category. In total, 63 posts in the chosen timeframe were identified of having to some extent a post-truth substance, from which 34 posts were attributable to the FPÖ and 29 to the AfD. Despite the significant difference between the two parties in the overall number of posts due to the FPÖ nearly posting twice as much as the AfD in February and March 2021, a similar number of posts with post-truth substance was detected in the samples of both parties. Due to the limited data available, it is difficult to tell if this ratio discrepancy points to a different weighting of post-truth claims in the general communication of the two parties or if it is stemming from other reasons. Nevertheless, the number of posts identified still shows that both parties rely significantly on post-truth strategies in their political communication on Facebook, especially since the respective posts were all significantly more sophisticated, considerably longer and more detailed as well as more substantive content-wise than those without post-truth substance.

It further must be noted that the length of each post also considerably influenced how many post-truth strategies were found, with text-heavy posts being particularly prone to consist of multiple post-truth strategies and therefore offering numerous categorization possibilities. This was far more often the case for AfD-posts than for FPÖ-posts since the German right-wing populist party repeatedly posted entire public statements of various party-representatives with up to 400 words. Similarly, some posts were innately consisting of two different post-truth strategies due to their subject matter, making them eligible for various categories by default. This was for example the case for posts that aimed at delegitimizing political expertise (MS2) by employing deceptive communication like false claims (MS1).

Nevertheless, it was possible for all posts in question, even the longer ones, to single out a predominant strategy and categorize them accordingly by focusing on the core issue of the post and the assumed purpose of it. Most of the previously mentioned posts eligible for categories MS1 and MS2 for example were ultimately categorized as MS2 since the strategy behind the post itself was far more about delegitimizing an opponent than to deceive a targeted audience. All the results from the application of the Post-Truth Identification Framework were quantified and are presented in detail in the following table:

Table 3: Breakdown by Post-Truth Identification Category and Party

Category	No. of Posts FPÖ	No. of Posts AfD
Overall	34	29
MS1	18	17
MS1.SS1	11	7
MS1.SS2	3	2
MS1.SS3	4	6
MS1.SS4	0	2
MS2	13	11
MS2.SS1	5	3
MS2.SS2	5	2
MS2.SS3	3	6
MS3	3	1
MS3.SS1	1	1
MS3.SS2	2	0

The most frequently encountered post-truth strategy in the posts of both parties was deceptive communication (FPÖ: 18/AfD: 17), with most identified posts in this category relying content-wise on some form of disinformation. For the AfD, this included for example the unsubstantiated claim that there will be a 20% higher death rate among cancer patients due to a lack of treatment possibilities during the pandemic and that the infection protection law introduced by the government was fully depriving the German federal states of their power. The FPÖ on the other hand for example claimed that the benefit of lockdowns, PCR-tests and FFP2-masks has been scientifically disproven and that the Austrian Government has decided to introduce compulsory vaccination. Fake News were shared or posted 3 times by the FPÖ

and twice by the AfD in the examined timeframe, all of it originating from party-owned media disguised as news-channels. Whereas 4 posts of the FPÖ and six posts of the AfD were identified as spreading various rumors related to the COVID-19-pandemic, for example by alleging corrupt activities surrounding the purchase of masks in Germany or purporting that Austria will copy the regulations concerning the vaccination certification from Israel, only two posts in total (both from the AfD) could be categorized as referring to a conspiracy theory.

Falling under the Category MS2, 13 posts of the FPÖ and 11 posts of the AfD were identified to delegitimize and politicize expertise, with most of them contesting expertise on the political level and disputing decisions made during the pandemic. Whereas the FPÖ predominantly focused on questioning the objectivity and impartiality of government representatives and mitigation measures, the AfD more often called the governments capabilities into question. As expected, MS3 is the main category with the least posts assigned to, since the post-truth strategies inherent to it are by their nature rarely appearing isolated in a single post and therefore become more difficult to capture when analyzing and categorizing posts separately. The four cases in which the respective category was possible to be assigned consisted either of narrative contradictions withing the post, for example when the AfD simultaneously criticized German vaccine shortages and the planned export ban on them, or incoherent narrative linkages, such as the fabricated comparison by the FPÖ of intra-state border controls during the pandemic and during the migration crisis in 2015. From a larger perspective however, the respective post-truth strategies become far more evident. When examining the sample in its entirety, the sheer density of different narratives and claims on various pandemic-related topics employed by both parties that can be observed are clearly pointing to obfuscation attempts characteristic for the post-truth strategy of Narrative Multiplication and Proliferation.

To summarize, both right-wing populist parties do indeed rely on post-truth claims and strategies in their political communication on Facebook to an extent which warrants further investigation. By applying the Post-Truth Identification Framework and quantifying the amount of post-truth claims present in the sample, the first part of the guiding hypothesis of this thesis can therefore be confirmed and a sound foundation is laid to test the second part of the hypothesis by examining the content of the respective posts in more detail in order to

shine a light on how these claims are strategically employed by the FPÖ and AfD to mobilize voters in the current climate of pandemic-related public distrust and uncertainty.

6.2. Part 2: Frame Analysis of the Facebook communication of the FPÖ and AfD

After establishing the extent to which the Austrian and German right-wing populist parties FPÖ and AfD rely on post-truth claims in their political communication on Facebook, the next step is to investigate to what ends these claims are employed during the COVID-19-pandemic and if an underlying mobilization strategy can be discovered. By drawing from the previously elaborated elements of frame theory in communication and social movement studies, the sample of post-truth claims derived from the political communication of the two right-wing populist parties FPÖ and AfD on Facebook in the chosen timeframe was analyzed in terms of dominant Collective Action Frames employed. Since the sample consisted of a relatively modest amount of 63 Facebook posts, a qualitative and deductive approach was chosen for the analysis, which included a detailed investigation of the content, the context and the linguistic components of each post and a careful examination and subsequent grouping of recurring narrative patterns. Special attention was given to the identification of a possible Master Frame underlying detectable Collective Action Frames as well as potential Frame Alignment processes. The analysis revealed the reliance of both parties on the traditional populist anti-establishment frame as Master Frame, which has been denoted as “The People vs. The Elite Frame”. Based on this Master Frame, the two right-wing populist parties derive three different dominant Collective Action Frames, which are analyzed in detail on the following pages.

Table 4: Framing Pyramid of the FPÖ/AfD

Master Frame	The People vs. The Elite		
Collective Action Frames	Capability Frame (CAF1)	Corruption Frame (CAF2)	Fundamental Rights Frame (CAF3)

6.2.1. Master Frame: “The People vs. The Elite”

In the process of analysis, it quickly became clear that the framing effort of both parties in their pandemic-related post-truth communication was substantially derived from the traditional populist anti-establishment frame. As elaborated in Chapter 2.1, the central element of Populism is the suggested Manichean division of society between “the people” and “the elite”, with populist actors presenting themselves as the genuine voice of the former, representing their collective interest and fighting for the general will of the people against the special interest of a corrupt elite. Consequently, populist discourse in general is to a large extent structured around a frame capturing this presupposed societal antagonism between a community of “pure” people on the one hand and a vicious establishment on the other, with the frame being modified and interpreted differently depending on the specific form of populism or its socio-political context. Due to its broadness and flexibility, this anti-establishment frame therefore fulfills the characteristics of a Master-Frame, from which populist actors can deduce Collective Action Frames aligned to a specific situation or cause in their frame-related discursive mobilization efforts.

The analyzed post-truth discourse of the AfD and FPÖ on Facebook considerably draws upon this Master Frame, attempting to capitalize from the climate of public opinion in the current pandemic, which is not only characterized by increased public uncertainty and anxiety, but also growing frustration and anger in parts of the population towards the governmental crisis management as well as towards COVID-19-mitigation measures and restrictions. Consequently, both parties discursively approach the pandemic not as a severe global health crisis with millions of casualties, but rather as an inconvenient hyperbole for which a small elite bears responsibility. The discursive strategy that becomes visible in the post-truth posts of the FPÖ and AfD centers on emphasizing the daily struggle of ordinary people under the pandemic restrictions while leaving aside the evident reasons that make these measures necessary in the first place. The respective governments in Austria and Germany are depicted as the main culprits responsible for the constraints under which the populations have to suffer and proponents of mitigation measures from politics, media, science or civil society are portrayed as a small, but powerful elite aiming to assert their interests. Conceptually, the modification of this Master Frame by the two right-wing populist parties therefore entails on the one hand a definition “the people” which includes all those who are sceptic of the severity of the virus, governmental mitigation measures and the pandemic as a whole, and on the other hand a definition of “the elite” including representatives of the institutionalized establishment

and everyone who supports pandemic-related restrictions. The evident similarities of this framing effort to the general attitudes prevalent in the “Querdenker”-scene indicate that both parties attempt to employ a Frame Alignment process, namely Frame Bridging, in order to tap into the apparent mobilization potential.

6.2.2. CAF1: Capability Frame

The first dominant Collective Action Frame to be mentioned here revolves around the competence of the government to handle the current pandemic and has therefore been denominated as “Capability Frame”. At the center of its narrative stands the allegation, that the government has demonstrated a total incapacity on all fronts throughout the COVID-19-crisis and is consequently inapt to continue its term in office. This frame focuses on attributing the persistence of the pandemic and the resulting critical condition of the domestic economy and the labor market as well as the continuous upholding of restrictions to sloppiness, arbitrariness and a lack of planning and leadership on the side of the government. Mitigation measures are depicted as pointless and futile constraints, which are symptomatic for the total failure of the government to come up with real solutions. Whereas pandemic-related health concerns are largely ignored, governmental restrictions are pictured as the real source of the crisis in this frame. In line with Entman’s (1993) conceptualization of the functional components of a frame, the “Capability Frame” thus identifies the negative socio-economic implications of the pandemic as a problem which is directly caused by a general incompetence of the government. Both the AfD and the FPÖ condemn this incompetency with rigor in their framing effort and demand the resignation of the government and above all Chancellor Merkel and Chancellor Kurz as a remedy.

The lockdown functions as the epitome of the governmental incapacity and the source of all evil, with its usefulness to combat the spread of the virus being repeatedly scrutinized and its alleged monetary and humanitarian costs emphasized. The FPÖ for example wrote in one post, that “the lockdown has no benefits for health-related policies, but causes enormous harm”¹³³, while the AfD stated in another post, that “implementing lockdowns is the only thing the government is good at, which is the ruin of innumerable traditional enterprises in the gastronomy, in commerce and in the hotel trade”.¹³⁴ By framing the lockdown as an unnecessarily excessive and counterproductive measure, that does more harm than good and

¹³³ FPÖ, February 7th, 2021

¹³⁴ AfD, March 23rd, 2021

is only implemented due to a prevalent governmental cluelessness and complete lack of alternative ideas, both parties presumably attempt to reinvigorate and validate the similar attitudes of COVID-19-skeptical parts of the population, for example people in the “Querdenker”-scene, which indicates a Frame Amplification mechanism.

Thematically, the AfD employed the “Capability Frame” also regarding the slow rate of vaccinations in Germany, especially in February. The absence of sufficient vaccinations due to delivery delays of pharmaceutical companies was hereby depicted as a personal failure of Chancellor Merkel, for example by stating “hardly any vaccines, useless hotlines. Vaccination chaos - Our government is simply incompetent”¹³⁵ or claiming that “we [the Germans] paid up to 750 million euros of taxpayers-money for vaccine development and now it is exported all over the world, while none is available for us” and that “under the leadership of Merkel, vaccinations are proceeding at a snail’s pace”¹³⁶. The FPÖ on the other hand focused its capability-framing effort more on emphasizing an ostensible chaos and opacity in the mitigation strategy of the Austrian government which allegedly resulted in a jungle of regulations where nobody knows their way around anymore in order to delegitimize mitigation measures like mandatory testing, for example by claiming that “the federal states are thrown into chaos by the government” due to “a test-chaos including long lines in front of schools or chaos in front of stores thanks to the nonsensical square meter regulation and much more”.¹³⁷

6.2.3. CAF2: Corruption Frame

The second Collective Action Frame to be mentioned centers on the alleged venality of the government and includes all narratives of corruption and hidden moneymaking agendas. This “Corruption Frame” emphasizes financial aspects of the governmental mitigation strategies and focuses on accusing governmental representatives of bribery and fraud as well as monetarily profiteering from the pandemic. The consequential spike in state expenditures to implement health measures and to counter negative side-effects of the pandemic is hereby framed as actually being an immediate consequence of a huge moneymaking scheme, where the government acts as patron for pro-government businesses by distributing pandemic-related public contracts and funds to the detriment of the taxpayer. Drawing again from

¹³⁵ AfD, February 1st, 2021

¹³⁶ AfD, February 3rd, 2021

¹³⁷ FPÖ, February 9th, 2021

Entman (1993), the increased government spending during the COVID-19-crisis is therefore identified as the problem in this frame and the corruptibility of the government as its cause. Equal to CAF1, both parties resort to morally condemning this corruption and calling for an immediate resignation of the accused government representatives.

Posts where this frame was detected included statements like “it has not been about a health crisis for a long time. It is primarily about power, about control, about profiteering and, above all, about dividing society”¹³⁸. It is worth mentioning, that the “Corruption Frame” was significantly more present in the Facebook communication sample of the AfD than the FPÖ, most probably due to specific domestic circumstances in the investigated timespan. When certain irregularities in the state procurement of masks created a stir in Germany’s media landscape in February 2021 and allegations of political bribery and corruption surfaced, the AfD focused much of their Facebook content on this matter and framed it accordingly by posting about “dubious mask-deals”¹³⁹ and the “the great mask-affair”¹⁴⁰ for which the “CDU cashed in 7.000 Euros from a mask-deal-company”¹⁴¹. Even though the allegations were all soon resolved, these instances still functioned as a perfect opportunity for the party to propagate the narrative of the “Corruption Frame” and highlight the supposed damage for taxpayers, for example by stating that “it would be an unforgivable event if it turns out that the health of citizens was abused for illegal businesses” by the government and that “in the worst case taxpayer have to pay more than 138 million euro per week for the masks of Hartz-4 recipients”¹⁴². The AfD further included warnings of an increased contraction of debts in their framing effort, especially regarding the financial participation of Germany in the post-COVID-19 reconstruction fund of the European Union, stating among other things, that “the Bundestag approves EU-debt-union – verbally obfuscated as EU-reconstruction-fund in the Corona crisis”¹⁴³.

6.2.4. CAF3: Fundamental Rights Frame

The third Collective Action Frame that was detected in the sample of the FPÖ and AfD is denominated as “Fundamental Rights Frame” and includes a variety of narratives which focus on supposed autocratic tendencies of the government during the pandemic. In this framing

¹³⁸ FPÖ, February 19th, 2021

¹³⁹ AfD, February 25th, 2021

¹⁴⁰ AfD, March 2nd, 2021

¹⁴¹ AfD, March 17th, 2021

¹⁴² AfD, February 15th, 2021

¹⁴³ AfD, March 27th, 2021

strategy, governmental mitigation measures and safety restrictions are presented as profound cutbacks on personal freedoms and fundamental rights as well as far-reaching state interventions into the individual right to self-determination. Factually speaking, this of course carries a certain element of truth, since regulations like mandatory mask-wearing and testing obligations or curfews and prohibitions of gatherings obviously are unprecedented restrictions of personal freedoms, at least in a European context. Narratives in this frame however completely leave aside the evident necessity of these measures to save human lives and see the sole reason behind them in alleged governmental phantasies of omnipotence, lust for power and autocratic or totalitarian leadership. The problem identified in this frame is thus the loss of individual freedom and fundamental rights in the pandemic due to the mandatory subordination to mitigation measures forced onto the population by a government with a totalitarian agenda. As self-declared protector of the ordinary citizen and his democratic freedoms, both the AfD and FPÖ presented themselves as morally superior to the government in their framing effort and claimed these developments and measures must be stopped and immediately reversed before it is too late.

The AfD hereby heavily relied on directing personal attacks on Chancellor Merkel and questioning her democratic understanding and integrity. The framing particularly targeted the lockdown and the implemented curfews, which were condemned as instances of liberticidal paternalism by the German government. The party for example claimed that “Merkel works on disempowering the federal states”¹⁴⁴ or that she “wants curfews and lockdown until April”¹⁴⁵ and that all of this “is the key to understanding the undemocratic mindset of Angela Merkel”¹⁴⁶. Additionally, a specific dimension of the AfD’s employment of the “Fundamental Rights Frame” was its embedment into a wider conspiracy-theoretical narrative which sees these alleged anti-democratic and liberty-restricting mitigation measures during the pandemic as part of an attempted political seizure of power by a hardline-leftist, eco-socialist elite supported by the Merkel government. The party hereby claimed verbatim, that “the assembled left (...) wants to use this crisis as an opportunity to completely re-educate us and drastically restrict our mobility for all time to come” by “building a paternalistic system, which defines for all ordinary citizens what they have to do and, above all, what they have to refrain from doing “.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ AfD, March 30th, 2021

¹⁴⁵ AfD, March 22nd, 2021

¹⁴⁶ AfD, February 4th, 2021

¹⁴⁷ AfD, March 23rd, 2021

Overall, this frame however enjoyed significantly less prominence in AfD posts than in FPÖ posts. In the FPÖ sample, the “Fundamental Rights Frame” was by far the most visible and most present Collective Action Frame and included inter alia claims that “for months now, we [the Austrians] have been experiencing massive restrictions on our fundamental rights and freedoms”¹⁴⁸ and that the government “establishes an authoritarian state”¹⁴⁹. This frame was particularly employed by the FPÖ towards implemented pandemic-related changes in the legislations, for example with posts stating that “the Corona-Amendment is nothing more than an unrestricted carte blanche for the total surveillance state”¹⁵⁰ and “a scandal of democracy and legal policy in a class of its own”¹⁵¹. The different weighting of the “Fundamental Rights Frame” in the communication of the FPÖ and the AfD may also again be attributable to domestic developments or to be more precise, due to an apparent diverging thematical prioritization in the communication of the two parties.

In the frame analysis, it became apparent that the increasing number of “Querdenker”-protests in Austria were a central topic for the FPÖ in the investigated timeframe, which is unsurprising, since the protests generated extensive media coverage and occupied considerable parts of the public and political discourse in the first months of 2021. The FPÖ consequently used the “Fundamental Rights Frame” in defense of the protests, who were repeatedly prohibited and restricted by the government due to the wide-ranging disregard of and non-compliance with legal COVID-19-regulations during the protests as well as the increasing propensity to violence among protestors. In one post they for example stated, that “concerned citizens have a right to criticize the government, but it is precisely this criticism that the government cannot deal with, because it does not fit into its concept. Therefore, they want to silence government critics by banning peaceful demonstrations”.¹⁵² Although a considerable number of groups and individuals associated with the far-right and neo-nazi scene in Austria have frequently participated in the protests, the FPÖ propagated a narrative in which the protesters were depicted as peaceful government critics faced with oppression and reprisals from a partisan police force under the leadership of Interior Minister Nehammer, claiming that in an “insane and incendiary action”, a member of the government “takes the

¹⁴⁸ FPÖ, February 2nd, 2021

¹⁴⁹ FPÖ, March 7th, 2021

¹⁵⁰ FPÖ, March 17th, 2021

¹⁵¹ FPÖ, March 4th, 2021

¹⁵² FPÖ, February 4th, 2021

police hostage for party political reasons and wants to sic them on peaceful government critics”.¹⁵³

The “Fundamental Rights Frame” furthermore prominently manifested in the discourse of the FPÖ on COVID-19-vaccinations, in which the party repeatedly claimed that the government and especially Chancellor Kurz conspire to implement forced vaccinations and that vaccine records will be used for mass surveillance as well as to divide the Austrian society accordingly, with non-vaccinated citizens subsequently losing their fundamental democratic rights. They stated for example in their posts, that “Chancellor Kurz's plan is absolutely inhumane: he wants to divide people into the vaccinated and the non-vaccinated, the well-behaved and the naughty, the obedient and the non-obedient”¹⁵⁴. As mentioned in Chapter 2.3.2, vaccine skepticism is a prevalent attitude among people who protest COVID-19 measures and it therefore stands to reason, that the narrative employed by the FPÖ regarding vaccinations might indicate a “Frame Extension” mechanism on the side of the Austrian right-wing populist party.

6.2.5. Summary and Discussion of the Frame Analysis

To summarize, the frame analysis conducted on the post-truth Facebook communication of the two right-wing populist parties FPÖ and AfD has revealed the prevalence of three dominant Collective Action Frame in the sample, which are all originating from a pandemic-related modification of the traditional anti-establishment populist Master Frame and therefore narratively concern themselves with delegitimizing and discrediting the respective governments in Austria and Germany. The extent to which each frame was detected in the communication sample differed between the two parties: Whereas CAF1 (“Capability Frame”) played a more prominent role in the Facebook posts of the AfD, CAF3 (“Fundamental Rights Frame”) was significantly more apparent in the posts of the FPÖ. CAF2 (“Corruption Frame”) was barely covered by the FPÖ, but relatively present in the AfD sample. These disparities can be explained on the one hand by the influence specific domestic events evidently have on the thematic orientation of the FPÖ’s and AfD’s communication and on the other by the different domestic context the two parties are situated in as well as the resulting divergence in their short-term political goal. Whereas in Germany national election are right around the corner, the government in Austria is only in its second year of its term. It

¹⁵³ FPÖ, February 3rd, 2021

¹⁵⁴ FPÖ, March 8th, 2021

therefore stands to reason, that the specific strategies of the two oppositional parties may differ to some extent, with the FPÖ rather focusing their claims on a desired resignation of the Austrian government and above all Chancellor Kurz, and the AfD aiming to reduce the share of votes in the upcoming elections of the parties that are currently in the German government. However, both parties have employed all three Collective Action Frames in their discursive effort to tap into the increased pandemic-related mobilization potential apparent in the population by establishing or strengthening a divide between the government and its citizens through post-truth claims. The detection of three specific processes of Frame Alignment directed at COVID-19-skeptical people in the framing effort of both parties, namely Frame Bridging (Master Frame), Frame Amplification (CAF1) and Frame Extension (CAF3), are a further indication of this discursive mobilization strategy.

7. Conclusion and further considerations

The scope of this thesis research focused on investigating to which extent two right-wing populist parties, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), strategically make use of post-truth claims for the purpose of political mobilization in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The two parties were chosen as cases on the one hand due to their comparability resulting from their evident political and ideological similarities highlighted in the chapters 4.2 and 5.2. Especially their self-declared political propinquity was hereby as pivotal as their shared experience of ideological intra-party quarrels. On the other hand, the FPÖ and AfD were selected based on the similar pandemic-related context they are situated in. This includes the congruent pandemic-related implications stemming from their geographic proximity, for example the similar epidemiological situation in Austria and Germany and the relative similarity of the governmental crisis and mitigation management in both countries, but also the correlative dynamics of public protests against COVID-19 measures especially salient in the German-speaking area of Europe. As highlighted previously, particularly the latter reason was assumed to have a comparable impact on the political and communicative strategies of both parties, since the accelerating protest dynamics constitute a fertile ground for an increased mobilization potential.

To conduct the research, this thesis at first established a sound theoretical framework based on a thorough literature analysis which gave detailed insights into the definition and conceptualization of populism and in particular right-wing populism as well as a

comprehensive discussion on the phenomenon of post-truth. Due to the lack of a coherent approach in the academic study of the latter, a practice-oriented conceptualization of the political manifestation of post-truth was especially emphasized, from which a framework to identify post-truth politics was subsequently deduced. These theoretical elaborations laid the foundation onto which the methodological research part of this thesis was carried out. For the purpose of following a qualitative investigative approach, the pandemic-related Facebook communication of the two selected parties in the timeframe of February to March 2021 was chosen as a sample, which consisted of a total of 219 posts and was consequently studied in a two-step process.

In the first step, the entire sample was analyzed according to a possible post-truth substance by applying the previously established Post-Truth Identification Framework. 63 posts in the chosen timeframe were hereby identified, which showed that both parties rely to a significant extent on post-truth claims in their political communication on Facebook and confirmed the validity of this thesis academic interest. In the second step, a Frame Analysis which drew considerably from the conceptualization of Frame Theory in communication and social movement studies was conducted on the content of the remaining sample of 63 posts with post-truth substance, in order to investigate to what ends these post-truth claims are employed by the FPÖ and AfD during the COVID-19 pandemic and if an underlying mobilization strategy can be discovered. The analysis revealed the reliance of the FPÖ and AfD on a pandemic-related modification of the traditional populist anti-establishment frame as a Master Frame and the prevalence of three dominant mobilization frames (Collective Action Frames) in the communication of both parties, which focus on scrutinizing the capabilities of the government to manage the COVID-19 crisis (CAF1), alleging a hidden moneymaking agenda and overall corruptibility of the government during the pandemic (CAF2) and presenting governmental mitigation measures and safety restrictions as autocratic restrictions of personal freedoms and fundamental rights (CAF3). Furthermore, several Frame Alignment processes have been detected in the framing effort of both parties, directly indicating intentional discursive mobilization efforts.

By combining the results received from the application of the Post-Truth Identification Framework and the subsequent frame analysis, this thesis shows that the two right-wing populist parties FPÖ and AfD are indeed strategically employing pandemic-related post-truth claims as a discursive strategy in their communication to mobilize voters in the current

climate of increased public distrust and uncertainty. While the present study therefore achieves its goal in delivering a well-founded answer to its research question, some overall limitations of this research must be noted. Due to a lack of resources and time, the conceptual framework of this thesis was solely based on a qualitative approach and a rather small sample. A quantitative application of the Post-Truth Identification Framework on larger sized sample would undoubtedly yield a more comprehensive and precise insight into the prevalence of post-truth claims and strategies in the communication of the two parties during the pandemic. Likewise, an extension of the sample sources to official party documents, speeches and content on other communication channels and a subsequent large-scale frame analysis would provide a more in-depth look not only into the dominant Collective Action Frames already detected through this research, but also into possible additional frames. Lastly, a widening of the investigated timeframe certainly would produce a more holistic image of the pandemic-related discursive post-truth strategies of the two parties in question, especially since the COVID-19-crisis has been developing dynamically over the course of 2020 and 2021 and domestic circumstances in Austria and Germany therefore have been changing rather rapidly. In sum, this thesis can be described as providing a first glimpse into the topic and establishing a sound foundation, from which further research can draw.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Collected Samples (Categorized with the Post-truth Identification Framework)

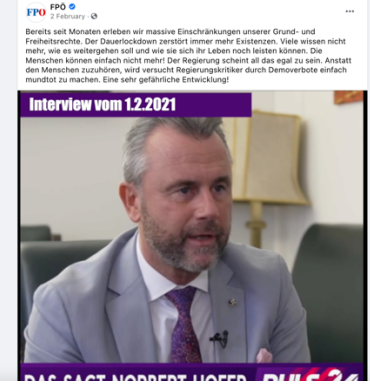
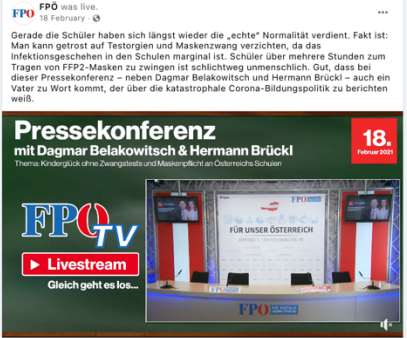
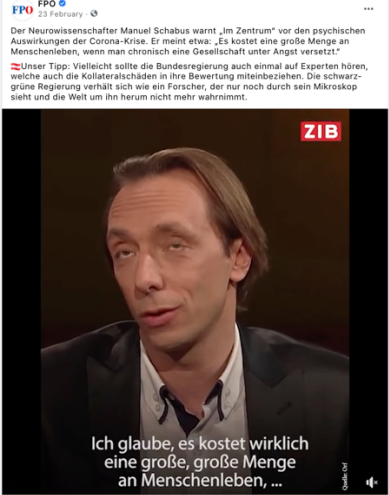
Category: MS1 - Deceptive communication			
Date	Party	Post	Sub-Category
03.02.2021	AfD	AfD 3 February ++ „Im Großen und Ganzen nichts schief gelaufen“ ++ Mit diesen weltfremden Worten verharmlost Kanzlerin Angela Merkel ihr totales Impf-Versagen. Worte, die sie offenbar aus dem Raumschiff einer fremden Galaxie gesendet hat. Nicht allein genug damit, dass es mit den Impfungen unter ihrer Führung im Schnecken-tempo vorangeht – ihr Impf-Management ist auch für den Steuerzahler ein Desaster. Skandal! 750 Mio. € Steuergeld - aber kaum Impfstoff vorhanden: https://afdKompakt.de/_steuergeld-750-millionen-eur-/ Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende: https://www.afd.de/spenden2021 Kennen Sie schon unseren Telegram-Kanal? Sofort abonnieren! https://www.t.me/afdbrennpunkt	MS1.SS1
04.02.2021	AfD	AfD 4 February ++ Ist das der Schlüssel für das Verständnis der undemokratischen Geisteshaltung von Angela Merkel? ++ Ein Interview lässt tief in ihr Innerstes blicken: https://afdKompakt.de/_angela-merkel-1991-vielleicht-/ Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende... See more	MS1.SS3
09.02.2021	AfD	AfD 9 February +++ EILMELDUNG: Lockdown soll erneut verlängert werden! ++ Reine Willkür: Plötzlich soll der Lockdown wegen des R-Werts weitergehen! Ständig werden neue Kriterien gefunden, um einen Vorwand für eine Verlängerung des „Lockdowns“ zu erzeugen. Erst sollten die Krankenhäuser nicht überlastet werden. Als die Krankenhäuser nicht überlastet waren, sollten die Infidenzerte sinken. Nun sinken die Infidenzerte, und es wird plötzlich aus heilem Himmel wieder der R-Wert als entscheidendes Kriterium herangeführt. Schluss mit diesen dreisten Statistik-Tricks – der „Lockdown“ muss sofort beendet werden! Wir sagen: Die Risikogruppen müssen besser geschützt werden! https://afdKompakt.de/_reine-willkuer-ploetzlich-soll-/	MS1.SS1

11.02.2021	AfD	AfD 11 February ++ Brisant: Regierungs-Institut sabotiert vielversprechenden Corona-Impfstoff! ++ Für die AfD steht außer Frage, dass eine Corona-Impfung immer freiwillig sein muss – aber wenn sich jemand dazu entscheidet, dann muss der Impfstoff auch zur Verfügung stehen. Doch genau das sabotiert das Paul-Ehrlich-Institut im Fall eines Lübecker Labor-Arzt Prof. Winfried Stöcker, dessen Wirkstoff vielversprechende 90 % Wirksamkeit erreicht und dabei keine mRNA verwendet. Mehr erfahren: https://afdkompakt.de/_/regierung-sabotiert.../ Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende: https://www.afd.de/spenden2021 Kennen Sie schon unseren Telegram-Kanal? Sofort abonnieren! https://www.t.me/afdbrennpunkt 	MS1.SS2
20.02.2021	AfD	AfD 20 February Der Oberbürgermeister Kretschmann musste sich in den letzten Monaten überhaupt keine Sorgen um sein Einkommen machen, mault aber nun darüber, dass die Bürger „öffnen, öffnen, öffnen“ fordern. In drei Wochen können die Bürger in Baden-Württemberg diesen freiheitsfeindlichen Lockdown-Grünen endlich abwählen, und auch die Bürger in Rheinland-Pfalz können am gleichen Tag dem dortigen grünen Regierungs-Spuk ein Ende setzen. Unser Bundessprecher Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen findet die passenden Worte für Kretschmann: ----- „Vielleicht sollte mal einer seiner gut bezahlten Berater in der baden-württembergischen Staatskanzlei Herrn Kretschmann schonend beibringen, dass geöffnete Geschäfte und aktive Unternehmen aus Sicht unseres Grundgesetzes der absolute Normalfall sind. Im Klartext: Nicht Geschäftsleute, die ihre Unternehmen betreiben wollen, müssen sich rechtfertigen, sondern der Staat, der dies verhindern möchte. Und das Eis, auf dem sich die Befürworter des Merkel-Söder-Endlos-Lockdowns bewegen, wird immer dünner. Stand gestern hat beispielsweise das Land Baden-Württemberg eine Coronainzidenz von 41,9 aufzuweisen – was nichts anderes bedeutet, als dass bei 99.958 von 100.000 Baden-Württembergern in den letzten sieben Tagen KEINE Infektion mit dem Coronavirus festgestellt wurde (ganz zu schweigen vom tatsächlichen Ausbruch einer entsprechenden Erkrankung). https://www.stuttgarter-nachrichten.de/inhalt.coronavirus... Es ist daher ein schwerer Verstoß gegen den rechtlich gebotenen Verhältnismäßigkeitsgrundsatz, die Geschäfte bei diesen aktuellen Zahlen weiter geschlossen zu halten. So kann es einfach nicht weitergehen, und es ist überhaupt kein Wunder, dass die Menschen endlich ihre Grundrechte zurückfordern. Offensichtlich fehlt Herrn Kretschmann aber jegliches Gespür dafür, was diese unverhältnismäßigen Maßnahmen im Leben der Menschen wirklich anrichten, und das bezieht sich beileibe nicht nur auf Unternehmer, die ihre Geschäfte nicht öffnen dürfen, sondern auch auf unzählige Familien und auch zunehmend vereinsamende Alleinlebende. So kommt es eben, wenn sich hier schon viel zu lange Regierende von den Realitäten der Bürger nicht nur entkoppliert haben, sondern sich dann zu allem Überfluss auch noch einseitig beraten lassen, und zwar von Einflüsterern, die ebenfalls weit weg sind von der Realität dieser Bürger. [...] Höchste Zeit daher für das Ende sowohl des Merkel-Söder-Endlos-Lockdowns als auch der „grünen“ Verbotspolitik in Deutschland. Höchste Zeit, die „Grünen“ aus ihren	MS1.SS4
25.02.2021	AfD	AfD 25 February ++ Bestechung? Korruptions-Razzia bei CSU-Fraktionsvize wegen Masken-Deal! ++ Eine brenzlige Razzia bei einem CSU-Bundestagsabgeordneten und Söder-Intimus sorgt derzeit für Spekulationen! Wegen des Verdachts der Bestechlichkeit und Bestechung von Mandatsträgern durchsuchten Beamte am Vormittag die Wohnung und das Abgeordnetenbüro von CSU-Fraktionsvize Georg Nüßlein. Dabei geht es um dubiose Masken-Deals der Bundesregierung und der bayerischen Landesregierung, die er einem Maskenhersteller für eine Provision von über 600.000 Euro verschafft und sich somit bereichert haben soll. Nüßlein war in den vergangenen Monaten immer wieder als Einpeitscher für überzogene Corona-Maßnahmen in Erscheinung getreten und verteidigte seinen Parteiliefer Markus Söder vehement gegen Kritik. Die aktuellen Vorwürfe müssen selbstverständlich lückenlos aufgeklärt werden. Denn es geht um das hart erarbeitete Steuergeld unserer Bürger, die in der Corona-Krise auf ein seriöses Vorgehen der Bundesregierung und der bayerischen Staatsregierung vertraut haben. Sollte sich herausstellen, dass die Gesundheit der Bürger für illegale Geschäfte missbraucht wurde, wäre dies ein unverzeihlicher Vorgang. https://afdkompakt.de/_/korruptions-razzia-bei-soeder-.../ Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende: https://www.afd.de/spenden2021 Kennen Sie schon unseren Telegram-Kanal? Sofort abonnieren! https://www.t.me/afdbrennpunkt 	MS1.SS3

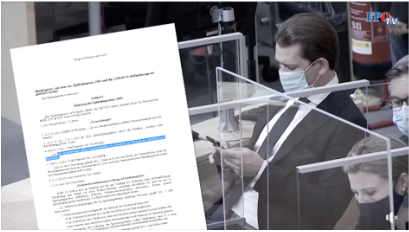
17.03.2021	AfD	AfD 17 March ++ CDU im Sumpf der Spenden- und Masken-Skandale! ++ Auch nach dem CDU-Absturz bei den Landtagswahlen weiten sich die Skandale der Partei immer mehr aus – jetzt geht es neben den Masken-Raffkes auch um umstrittene Spenden und dubiose Beraterfirmen. Inzwischen gibt es kaum noch eine Region in Deutschland, die nicht vom CDU-Sumpf heimgesucht wird: https://afdkompakt.de/_cdtu-im-sumpf-der-spenden-und-/ Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende: https://www.afd.de/spenden2021 Kennen Sie schon unseren Telegram-Kanal? Sofort abonnieren! https://www.t.me/afdbrennpunkt 	MS1.SS3
19.03.2021	AfD	AfD 19 March ++ „Dumm und dämlich verdient“ – Spahns Maskenverteilung wird zum Steuerskandal! ++ Während zahlreiche Branchen unter den in weiten Teilen unverhältnismäßigen Corona-Zwangsmaßnahmen der Regierung leiden, verteilt Gesundheitsminister Spahn munter Steuergelder. Erschreckend: Spahn setzte sich über die Empfehlung seiner Berater hinweg! https://afdkompakt.de/_dumm-und-daemlich-verdient-/... See more 	MS1.SS1
23.03.2021	AfD	AfD 23 March Jetzt sollen sogar an Gründonnerstag die Supermärkte geschlossen bleiben! Unfassbar - Merkel, Söder, Spahn, Scholz & Co. können einfach nichts anderes als Lockdown. Unser Bundessprecher Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen sagt heute Morgen dazu: ----- Unser Land befindet sich in der schwersten Krise seit seinem Bestehen, und die gestrige Konferenz der ratlosen Endlos-Kanzlerin mit den nicht weniger ratlosen Ministerpräsidenten machte dies überdeutlich: Lockdown verlängern, diesmal bis zum 18. April und jetzt sogar erstmalig mit der vollkommen absurden Schließung der Supermärkte am Gründonnerstag – mehr fällt den uns hier schon viel zu lange Regierenden seit einem Jahr (mit Unterbrechung im Sommer, aber nicht dank der Merkel-Regierung, sondern dank des guten, virusfeindlichen Wetters) nicht ein. https://www.welt.de/_Corona-Radikaler-Lockdown-ueber- Das Problem ist: Diese Regierenden können einfach nichts anderes. Sie können nicht für ausreichend Impfstoff sorgen, sie können keinen unbürokratischen Impfprozess organisieren, sie können keine Hochrisikogruppen wirksam schützen, sie können keine erfolgreiche App programmieren lassen, die dann auch wirklich ihren Zweck erfüllt, und obwohl es völlig klar ist, dass die mangelnde Digitalisierung der Gesundheitsämter ein zentrales Problem in dieser Pandemie ist, bekommen sie auch dieses Problem seit einem Jahr nicht im mindesten in den Griff, obwohl ein einziges entsprechendes Gesetz die Weichen hierfür stellen würde. Aber immerhin: Sie können Lockdown. Das ist doch schon mal was - beispielsweise ist es der Ruin unzähliger Traditionsunternehmen in Handel, Gastronomie und Hotellerie. Was wird am Ende dieser unsäglichen, von maximaler Unfähigkeit und Führungslosigkeit geprägten Coronapolitik von diesen Branchen übrig bleiben, und was vom deutschen Mittelstand insgesamt? Und wie viele Millionen Arbeitsplätze werden am Ende weg sein, wenn kurz nach der Bundestagswahl klar wird, dass man ein Land nicht auf Dauer mit Kurzarbeitergeld ernähren kann? Die Akzeptanz der Bevölkerung für diese permanente Entziehung grundgesetzlich garantierter Freiheitsrechte schwindet mit jedem Tag mehr, und ein Finanzminister und Kanzlerkandidat der SPD namens Olaf Scholz, der allen Ernstes potentiellen Osterurlaubern	MS1.SS4

		Und wie viele Millionen Arbeitsplätze werden am Ende weg sein, wenn kurz nach der Bundestagswahl klar wird, dass man ein Land nicht auf Dauer mit Kurzarbeitergeld ernähren kann? Die Akzeptanz der Bevölkerung für diese permanente Entziehung grundgesetzlich garantierter Freiheitsrechte schwindet mit jedem Tag mehr, und ein Finanzminister und Kanzlerkandidat der SPD namens Olaf Scholz, der allen Ernstes potentiellen Osterurlaubern einzureden versucht, wenn sie in Osterurlaub führen, gefährdeten sie damit den Sommerurlaub aller, trägt gewiss seinen Teil zum wachsenden Unmut der Bürger bei. In Anbetracht einer solchen wirklich hanebüchernen Politik drängt sich mehr und mehr der Verdacht auf, dass es den versammelten Linken und sogenannten „Grünen“ dieses Landes (bis hinein ins Kanzleramt zu ihrer größten Sympathisantin) ohnehin um etwas ganz anderes geht: Sie wollen diese Krise zum Anlass nehmen, uns komplett umzuwerfen und in unsere Mobilität für alle Zukunft drastisch einzuschränken. So wird jetzt zur unverantwortlichen Sünde erklärt, nach Mallorca zu fliegen. Fliegen ist jetzt nämlich pfui (wegen Klima und so), Reisen insgesamt ist pfui (außer natürlich wenn Özdemir in die Anden fliegt oder die bayerische Obergrüne Katharina Schulze zum Essen nach Kalifornien – die dürfen das), überhaupt Freiheit und Lebensfreude nach eigenem Gusto ist pfui. https://www.stuttgarter-nachrichten.de/inhalt.gruenen... https://www.tichyseinblick.de/_/katharina-schulze-zum... Ich sage es klipp und klar: Das einzige, was hier wirklich pfui ist, sind diese moralisierenden, sauerstoffischen, selbsternannten, totalitären Volksmerzer der Marke Lauterbach, Scholz, Esken, Habeck, Baerbock, Göring-Eckardt und Konsorten. Sie alle wollen den sogenannten „Klimaschutz“ dafür nutzen, die Gesellschaft nach sozialistischen Maßstäben umzubauen – und weil sich „sozialistisch“ irgendwie nicht mehr so richtig gut anhört nach einer ebensolchen Diktatur auf deutschem Boden, nennt man es nun „öko-sozial“. Das Ergebnis ist das gleiche: Eine sich im Besitz der moralischen Überlegenheit dünkende, pseudoelitäre und leider von den Medien unterstützte Gruppe linksradikaler Gesellschaftsklempner baut ein Bevormundungssystem auf, in dem für alle normalen Bürger festgelegt wird, was sie zu tun, vor allem aber, was sie alles zu LASSEN haben. Aber es liegt doch ganz einfach an uns Wählern selbst: Was wollen wir sein? Freie ... selbstbestimmte Bürger oder von sozialistischen Pseudo-Eliten geknechtete Untertanen? Noch haben wir die Wahl! Aber wenn das hier so weitergeht, dann könnte es mit dieser Wahl schon sehr bald vorbei sein: Sozialismus kann nämlich zwangsläufig immer nur mit Unterdrückung funktionieren, weil er schlicht und einfach gegen das tiefste menschliche Bedürfnis nach individueller Bedürfnisbefriedigung gerichtet ist. Im Herbst dieses Jahres zeichnet sich also eine echte Schicksalswahl für Deutschland ab: Wollen wir ein von linksgrünen Ökosozialisten und freiheitsfeindlichen Moralpredigern durchreglementiertes und geknechtetes Land werden, oder wollen wir unsere Freiheit erhalten? Wie sagte einst Adenauer: „Wenn wir die Wahl haben zwischen Freiheit und Sozialismus, wissen wir, was wir wählen: Wir wählen die Freiheit.“ https://www.konrad-adenauer.de/_/politische.../wahlkampf Hoffen wir, dass der medial seditierte deutsche Michel bis zum Wahltag aufwacht und wirklich die Freiheit wählt. Deren politischer Garant ist ausschließlich unsere konservativ-freiheitliche Bürgerpartei, die als einzige gewillt ist, dem linksgrünen Zeitgeist die Stirn zu bieten. Allerhöchste Zeit, dem linksgrünen Zeitgeist die Stirn zu bieten. Allerhöchste Zeit, unsere Freiheit vor einer erneuten („öko-“)sozialistischen Diktatur zu schützen. Allerhöchste Zeit für die AfD. https://www.facebook.com/554345401380836/posts/1912978925517470/ 	
25.03.2021	AfD	AfD 25. März ++ Klinikleiter befürchtet 40.000 zusätzliche Krebs-Tote wegen verfehlter Corona-Politik! ++ Es sind die sogenannten „Kollateralschäden“, die von der unverhältnismäßigen Corona-Politik zynisch in Kauf genommen werden: Ein Klinikleiter und Krebsarzt aus Hessen befürchtet bis zu 20 Prozent mehr Krebstote, weil Patienten sich vor Klinken fürchten und keine Termine für Untersuchungen und Behandlungen erhalten. Hochgerechnet wären das bis zu 40.000 zusätzliche Tote jährlich! Dieser bittere Preis der Corona-Politik wurde von Anfang an verharmlost und verschwiegen. Umso mehr gilt: Schluss mit dem „Lockdown“-Irrsinn! Risikogruppen schützen und Krankenhaus-Infrastruktur stärken! https://afdkompakt.de/_/klinikleiter-befuerchtet-40-... Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende: https://www.afd.de/spenden2021 Kennen Sie schon unseren Telegram-Kanal? Sofort abonnieren! https://www.t.me/afdbrennpunkt 	MS1.SS1
27.03.2021	AfD	AfD 27. März An Donnerstag beschloss der Bundestag das, was die Merkel-Regierung wollte, nämlich die EU-Schuldenunion – verbal vernebelt als „EU-Wiederaufbaufonds in der Corona-Krise“. Am gestrigen Freitag wurde der Irrsinn von Karlsruhe (zunächst) gestoppt: Steinmeier darf dieses desaströse Gesetz noch nicht unterzeichnen. Unser Bundessprecher Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen sagt dazu: ----- „Letztlich soll mit diesem sogenannten „Wiederaufbaufonds“ (unter dem Vorwand der zu erheblichen Teilen, zumindest hinsichtlich ihres Ausmaßes, selbstverschuldeten Corona-Krise) deutsche Souveränität noch weiter abgebaut und zugleich der rechtswidrige Einstieg in die dauerhafte Verschuldung der EU ermöglicht werden. Dies wiederum soll als Basis dienen für den großen Wunschtraum der versammelten Linken in Deutschland und der EU, nämlich für den europäischen Superstaat bei gleichzeitig endgültiger Aushöhlung der nationalstaatlichen Souveränität. In einem solchen, vom bürokratischen und realitätsfernen Brüssel aus gelenkten Superstaat lassen sich dann wunderbar Unsummen zuleiten der deutschen Steuerzahler umverteilen, ... und zwar zum einen in andere EU-Staaten, deren Bürger im Mittel längst wohlhabender sind als wir Deutsche, ... https://www.facebook.com/554345401380836/posts/1693245287490836/ ... und zum anderen aus produktiven Sektoren hin zu linksideologisch getriebenen Projekten, die nichts zur Wertschöpfung beitragen, sondern ausschließlich einer ganz bestimmten linksgrünen Klientel lappig Lohn und Brot verschaffen sollen, weil selbige auf dem normalen Arbeitsmarkt niemals vermittelbar wäre. Der Einstieg in dieses hauptsächlich von uns Deutschen finanzierte EU-Freigeld für alle wurde also nun von der Mehrheit des Deutschen Bundestages beschlossen, sehr zur Freude der vermerkten Bundesregierung bei gleichzeitig erbittertem Widerstand unserer Bundestagsfraktion. Dementsprechend hatte unsere Fraktion sofort am Donnerstag angekündigt, gegen das beschlossene Gesetz Organklage gegen Bundesregierung und Bundestag beim Bundesverfassungsgericht einzureichen. Dies ist nur folgerichtig, da wir der letzte Sachwalter deutscher Interessen in Brüssel sind und uns diese erneute Souveränitätsverschiebung zu Lasten der deutschen Bürger und ihrer Geldbeutel nicht gefallen lassen.	MS1.SS1

		gefallen lassen. Auch andere waren nicht untätig vor dem Verfassungsgericht und erreichten nun in Karlsruhe am gestrigen Freitag das hoch erfreuliche Ergebnis, dass Bundespräsident Steinmeier dieses uns allen massiv schadennde Gesetz nicht ausfertigen darf – zumindest solange, bis sich die Richter mit der Materie beschäftigen und über den entsprechenden Eilantrag entscheiden konnten. https://jungfreiheit.de/_/2021/schuldenunion-ausgebremst/ Wie auch immer diese Entscheidung juristisch ausfallen mag, muss auf der politischen Ebene klar sein: Wer durch die Vergemeinschaftung von Schulden zu Lasten Deutschlands einen EU-Superstaat will, sollte vorher die Deutschen in einem Referendum danach fragen, statt heimlich die Corona-Krise dafür zu missbrauchen. Höchste Zeit, die Deutschen über die wesentlichen Fragen ihres Landes abstimmen zu lassen. Höchste Zeit, den Weg in den EU-Schulden-Superstaat zu stoppen. Höchste Zeit für die #AID.* https://www.facebook.com/554345401380836/posts/1916077015207661/ 	
29.03.2021	AfD	AfD 29 March at 18:30 · 🌐 ++ AfD-Klage wirkt: Gericht erklärt Corona-Regeln für verfassungswidrig! ++ Eine Klage der AfD-Landtagsfraktion in Sachsen-Anhalt hat nun zu einer erneuten juristischen Klatsche für die Altparteien geführt: Das dortige Landesverfassungsgericht erklärte wesentliche Teile von Sachsen-Anhalts Corona-Regeln aus dem Herbst für verfassungswidrig und nichtig! Nach diesem ersten Erfolg geht es nun jedoch erst richtig los: https://afdkompakt.de/_/afd-klage-wirkt-gericht-/ Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende: https://www.afd.de/spenden2021 Kennen Sie schon unseren Telegram-Kanal? Sofort abonnieren! 📞 https://www.t.me/afdbrennpunkt 	MS1.SS1
30.03.2021	AfD	AfD 30 March at 14:37 · 🌐 ++ Lauterbach verplappert sich: Also DOCH Bewegungsprofile bei Corona-App? ++ Es wurde als vermeintlich absurde Verschwörungstheorie abgetan: Kritiker warnten, dass die umstrittene Corona-App in Bezug auf Datenschutz bedenklich ist – und dass vollständige Bewegungsprofile erstellt werden könnten. Nun hat der SPD-Politiker und selbsternannte Corona-Experte Karl Lauterbach sich verplappert. Er sei für eine nächtliche Ausgangssperre, denn: „Wir wissen aus den Bewegungsprotokollen der Fahrzeuge und der Handydaten, dass abends sehr viele Treffen stattfinden.“ Wie bitte? Bewegungsprotokolle der Fahrzeuge? Wie kommt eigentlich ausgerechnet SPD-Politiker Lauterbach an solche Protokolle heran? Fragen tun sich auf – aber fest steht unabhängig davon: Die Corona-App ist vor allem ein riesiger Flop der Bundesregierung und kein wirksamer Beitrag zum Gesundheitsschutz. Statt Überwachung sollten wir auf eine optimale Gesundheits- und Krankenhaus-Infrastruktur setzen. https://afdkompakt.de/_/lauterbach-verplappert-sich-/ Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende: https://www.afd.de/spenden2021 Kennen Sie schon unseren Telegram-Kanal? Sofort abonnieren! 📞 https://www.t.me/afdbrennpunkt 	MS1.SS3
30.03.2021	AfD	AfD 30 March at 20:20 · 🌐 ++ Gutachten zeigt: Merkel arbeitet an Entmachtung der Länder! ++ Erst war es „nur“ eine unverschämte Drohung bei „Anne Will“ – nun schreitet Angela Merkel offenbar zur Tat: Ein von ihrem Parteifreund Wolfgang Schäuble in Auftrag gegebenes Gutachten des Wissenschaftlichen Dienstes des Bundestages bescheinigt, dass das Infektionsschutzgesetz zur massiven Bevormundung der Bundesländer eingesetzt werden kann. Sogar die Schließung von Schulen kann von oben herab angeordnet werden – obwohl Bildung Ländersache ist. So werden die Länder, die Merkel in ihrem Machtanspruch wohl ohnehin als lästige Störenfriede betrachtet, immer weiter entmachtet. Es bestätigt sich somit, was die AfD schon lange sagt: Dieses Infektionsschutzgesetz entmachtet die Parlamente und öffnet die Türen zu einer unkontrollierbaren Machtfülle der Bundesregierung! https://afdkompakt.de/_/gutachten-zeigt-merkel-/ Bitte unterstützen auch Sie unsere Arbeit mit einer Spende: https://www.afd.de/spenden2021 Kennen Sie schon unseren Telegram-Kanal? Sofort abonnieren! 📞 https://www.t.me/afdbrennpunkt 	MS1.SS1

02.02.2021	FPÖ		MS1.SS3
07.02.2021	FPÖ		MS1.SS1
18.02.2021	FPÖ		MS1.SS1
23.02.2021	FPÖ		MS1.SS1

24.02.2021	FPÖ		MS1.SS1
25.02.2021	FPÖ		MS1.SS1
27.02.2021	FPÖ		MS1.SS2
27.02.2021	FPÖ		MS1.SS2

04.03.2021	FPÖ	FPO 6 March Der Wahnsinn geht munter weiter, denn statt Lockerungen plant Schwarz-Grün neue Grauslichkeiten im Covid-Maßnahmengesetz. Kurz gesagt: Die Novelle ist ein demokrati- und rechtspolitischer Skandal der Sonderklasse. Es drohen hohe Geld- bzw. Haftstrafen und jedes Treffen ab vier Personen soll bereits eine „Veranstaltung“ sein. Auch der Testzwang wird zur puren Realität. Fakt ist: Die Grund- und Freiheitsrechte werden weiter massiv eingeschränkt. Was hat diese Regierung mit Österreich vor? 	MS1.SS1
07.03.2021	FPÖ	FPO 7 March Anschober und Kurz, beide kinderlos, zerstören unsere Familien. Wenn junge Österreicher ein Baby bekommen und von ihren Eltern besucht werden, dann gilt der Besuch der frischgeborenen Großeltern künftig als Veranstaltung und muss angemeldet werden! Die Behauptung, dass im Wohnzimmer nicht kontrolliert werden wird, sind eine Lüge. Denn sobald ein Nachbar oder sonst irgendeine Person eine Anzeige erstattet, steht die Polizei vor der Tür. Türkis-Grün errichtet einen autoritären Staat. Wenn Ihr den Herren Kurz oder Anschober dazu Eure Meinung schreiben wollt, das sind Ihre Mail-Adressen: sebastian.kurz@fpoe.gv.at rudolf.anschober@sozialministerium.at  „Anschober und Kurz, beide kinderlos, zerstören unsere Familien!“ Norbert Hofer FPÖ-Obmann	MS1.SS1
08.03.2021	FPÖ	FPO 8 March Der Plan von ÖVP-Kurz ist absolut unmenschlich: Er will die Menschen in Geimpfte und Nicht-Geimpfte, in Brave und Nicht-Brave, in Gehorsame und Nicht-Gehorsame einteilen! Kurz will Nicht-Geimpfte de facto vom öffentlichen Leben ausschließen! Am heutigen Frauentag muss aber auf eine weitere traurige Entwicklung aufmerksam gemacht werden, nämlich die hohe Frauenerbeitslosigkeit in unserem Land. Eine weitere Folge des Lockdowns und der exzessiven Maßnahmen der schwarz-grünen Regierung. Wir bleiben dabei: Kurz muss weg! Quelle: ORF 	MS1.SS3
12.03.2021	FPÖ	FPO 12 March Wie schnell es mit der Freiwilligkeit vorbei sein kann, haben wir bereits bei den Masken und Tests gesehen. Spätestens nach dem Israel-Besuch von ÖVP-Kurz ist klar, wohin die Reise in Sachen Impfung geht. Denn dort plant man bereits Sanktionen gegen Personen, die sich nicht gegen Corona impfen lassen wollen. Bald auch bei uns in Österreich? Besonders erschreckend: Während Dänemark nun Impfungen mit AstraZeneca wegen massiver Komplikationen stoppt, setzt Österreich auch weiter auf genau diesen Impfstoff. Das ist wohl die neue Normalität von Sebastian Kurz! 	MS1.SS3

13.03.2021	FPÖ	FPÖ 13 March Völlig irre! Österreicher verlieren teils ihren Job und erhalten Repressalien, wenn sie sich nicht testen lassen. Illegale Schubhäftlinge werden mit der Freiheit belohnt. Sprich: Illegale Migranten dürfen machen, was die wollen und werden von Bundeskanzler Kurz und Gesundheitsminister Anschober dafür noch belohnt.  KRONE.AT Keine Abschiebung für Corona-Testverweigerer Sicherheitsalarm um Abschiebungen! In einem der „Krone“ vorliegenden Papier des...	MS1.SS1
13.03.2021	FPÖ	FPÖ 13 March Interessant! Sollte sich vielleicht Herr Kurz genauer durchlesen...  UNZENSIERT.AT Supergau für Kanzler Kurz: Nächste Studie sagt, dass "Lockdowns" nichts bringen - Unzensuriert	MS1.SS2
16.03.2021	FPÖ	FPÖ 16 March Mediziner bestätigen nun: Kein höheres Corona-Ansteckungsrisiko in Öffis! Warum sind die Gastro, die Hotellerie, Sportstätten und Fitnessstudios dann immer noch geschlossen? Und warum lässt man unsere Kinder und Jugendlichen nicht unbeschwert und wirklich regelmäßig in die Schule gehen? WARUM? 	MS1.SS1
17.03.2021	FPÖ	FPÖ 17 March Die von Gesundheitsminister Anschober überarbeiteten Corona-Gesetzesnovellen lassen Böses ahnen. Das Gesetz ist nichts anderes, als ein uneingeschränkter Freibrief für den totalen Überwachungsstaat. ✗ Man zwingt alle in die Impfung. ✗ Man zwingt alle in die Testung. ✗ Und man überwacht alle. Die Regierung setzt ihren Plan, von der Spaltung der Gesellschaft weiter fort. Das ist wohl die „neue Normalität“ von Kurz und Co.!  „Die überarbeiteten Corona-Gesetzesnovellen sind ein Freibrief für den totalen Überwachungsstaat!“ Dagmar Belakowitsch Stv. Klubobfrau	MS1.SS1

24.03.2021	FPÖ	FPÖ 24 March · 🌐 Kurz schwindelt und schwindelt. Während er in Österreich erzählt, dass auch ein Corona-Test ausreiche, um künftig etwa in ein Fitnesscenter zu kommen, sieht der „Grüne Pass“ in Israel etwas ganz anderes vor. Und genau das hat Kurz auch bei seinem Israel-Besuch (siehe Video) hautnah erleben müssen. Um dort nämlich ins Fitnesscenter zu kommen, reicht ein Test NICHT! Man muss entweder genesen oder GEMPFET sein! Schon bald auch in Österreich, Herr Kurz?	MS1.SS3
24.03.2021	FPÖ	FPÖ 24 March · 🌐 Was soll man dazu noch sagen? Die Bevölkerung im Osten Österreichs zahlt jetzt die Zeche für das Versagen der schwarz-grünen Bundesregierung, die nicht einmal in der Lage ist, die selbst gesteckten Ziele ihrer eigenen Corona-Strategie zu erfüllen.	MS1.SS1