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The German Populist Far-Right as a Radical Social Movement

Exploring the Relationship Between the Mainstreaming Strategies of the Populist Far Right and the Emergence of Hive Terrorism

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1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Outline

In recent years, right-wing extremism has made a notable comeback on a global scale, alerting policymakers, scholars and the public through startling and ongoing acts of terrorism and violence. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2019 published by the Institute for Economics & Peace, incidents of far-right terrorism in Western Europe, North America and Oceania increased by 320 % (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019) over the past five years. The manifestations of contemporary right-wing terrorism and violence are manifold, reaching from high fatality shooting rampages as in Christchurch (New Zealand) and El Paso (US) to clandestine assassinations of public figures including the murder of the German politician Walter Lübke in June 2019 (Quent, 2019a). Given its prominence and lethality, right-wing extremism has claimed top priority on national security agendas (Bjorgo & Ravndal, 2019). In March 2020, Thomas Haldenwang, President of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz – BfV), publicly declared right-wing extremism and terrorism the biggest current threat to democracy in Germany (The New York Times, 2020). According to him, the record number of victims of right-wing terrorism in 2019 has strongly underlined the need for a reallocation of resources and funding towards research on the far-right. After years of being preoccupied with Jihadist extremism, a shift of focus is essential (ibid.).

This process of reorientation is still far from being completed. However, the rapidly growing body of literature in the field already indicates several key developments concerning the characteristics and dynamics of the contemporary far-right threat. On the one hand, scholars such as Caiani & Kröll (2015) or Froio & Ganesh (2019) identify an increasing global connection between right-wing extremist groups, individuals and beliefs. This transnationalisation is strongly related to the rise of the internet as a main recruitment and radicalisation arena. The impact of Anders Breivik's massacre in Norway in 2011 on successive perpetrators from all over the world stands as an exemplar for this development (ibid.). On the other hand, Koehler (2018), Haldenwang (2020), and others recognise a growth of so-called hive terrorism, which refers to the involvement of "ordinary" citizens in

severe acts of right-wing terrorism and violence. Based on case studies of entries in the Database on Terrorism in Germany between 2012 and 2018, Koehler found that the majority of perpetrators involved in recent acts of right-wing terrorism and violence in Germany were "completely unknown to the security agencies before the attack (…) (2018, pp. 73). Lacking any previous long-term ties to the extreme right, those perpetrators often appeared to be "ordinary" citizens, who seemingly decided ad-hoc to attack what they perceived as an existential threat to themselves or society (e.g. immigrants, politicians, activists). In addition, while either acting alone or together with highly radicalised members of the extreme right, their attacks were conducted largely impulsively and spontaneously, missing long-term, sophisticated planning processes or organisational embeddedness (ibid.).

According to Haldenwang (2020), recent manifestations of this troubling development have been twofold: For one, "lone-actor"-attacks such as in Halle and Hanau, whereby both perpetrators only became known to the authorities through their actual acts of violence. Neither of the perpetrators was embedded into stable right-wing extremist groups or showed signs of significant long-term planning or radicalisation processes. Secondly, the phenomenon can be seen in ad-hoc pogrom-like mass violence directed against minorities (e.g. during the Chemnitz riots in 2018) as well as the spontaneous arson and explosive attacks against refugee homes and centres between 2015 and 2017 (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2020; Koehler, 2019b).

Figure 1: Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Germany

In this context, Koehler describes the case of a 48-year-old music teacher who committed eight arson attacks against government buildings in 2015 to make a statement against pro-immigration policies. Furthermore, he reminds of a 71-year-old woman who attempted to stage several false-flag attacks aiming at provoking hate against the Iranian refugees being located within her village (Koehler, 2018). The brutal barrage of a bus carrying refugees to an asylum centre in Clausnitz by a right-wing mob presents another example of spontaneous attacks conducted by a short-term, localised hybrid of radicals, extremists and "ordinary citizens", i.e. members of the mainstream society (Spiegel, 2016).

Koehler and Haldenwang thus observe that potential right-wing perpetrators not solely arise from (clandestine) radical and extreme networks including traceable radicalisation and planning processes, but also seemingly spontaneously from the midst of society. Similar to the concepts of stochastic terrorism or leaderless resistance, they assume that perpetrators do not necessarily identify with a single organisation or group but rather have their very own, individual worldview. Their worldview is composed of a variety of different ideologies, conspiracy theories, frames and narratives spread by far-right actors offline and online. This in return issues an immense challenge for the established anti-terror and anti-radicalisation tracking mechanisms, as the absence of visible and observable group structures makes it hardly possible to detect a high-risk violent radicalisation in time (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2020). Another challenge is the short run-up to an attack. Moreover, the individuality of the assembled ideologies, as well as the alleged randomness and spontaneity of the attacks, makes it almost impossible to draw up comparable perpetrator profiles or to make educated predictions. Instead of facing several organisationally embedded extremists belonging to a certain subculture, the authorities thus have to deal with a large pool of "ordinary" citizens, who may or may not react to the omnipresent extremist ideas and behaviour on the streets and in the virtual space. As a result, the existing challenges of identifying and monitoring the potential case of high-risk radicalisation are increased in a way that arguably renders conventional efforts inauspicious (i.e. "finding a needle in the haystack") (Koehler, 2018).

Targeting hive terrorism thus requires a paradigm shift. It is a shift moving away from solely studying specific (clandestine) extremist groups or individuals, towards achieving a broader understanding of the relationship between extremist networks and mainstream society. Since "ordinary" citizens are mobilised remotely and subtly without long-term organisational

embeddedness, this includes an understanding of the far-right landscape as a dynamic and fluid "network of networks": A social movement which interacts with mainstream society through several channels, e.g. social media, events, protests or print media. This sphere of interaction needs to be explored from various angles, asking questions such as: How do far-right actors approach mainstream society? Under which circumstances (e.g. where and when) are "ordinary" citizens likely to be mobilised to take part in or commit severe acts of far-right violence? Are there ideological or infrastructural crosscuttings between mainstream society and extremist networks which facilitate contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist groups and individuals? Are those crosscuttings based on broader socio-political developments or rather actively brought about by the far-right movement? On a macro-level, such perspective could enable the authorities to identify societal and political factors that increase the likelihood of "ordinary" citizens being (spontaneously) mobilised to take part in severe acts of violence. On a meso-level, analysing and mapping the strategies employed by far-right networks could foster the identification of potential target groups (both potential perpetrators and victims). Which, in return, might narrow down the list of objects of observation and hence facilitate the allocation of resources.

To date however, not only have the authorities but also academia has struggled to combine social movement and terrorism approaches. Instead, there has almost been a "division of labour" (Rydgren, 2007, pp. 257) between scholars studying right-wing terrorism and scholars focussing on the dynamics of contemporary far-right social movements. More specifically, while both fields have recently received considerable academic attention, theoretical or empirical attempts exploring potential interdependencies between both phenomena remain rare (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). Koehler's theoretical model concerning the emergence of hive terrorism, introduced in 2018, therefore not only presents a remarkable exception but also innovative spadework in the field. Acknowledging the need for a bigger picture of the relationship between modern far-right actors and mainstream society, he models the contemporary far-right as a network of "radical social movements" which face mainstream society in the "radical contrast society" (i.e. the sphere of interaction between movement and society). Strongly limiting his research to the macro-level, he finds several societal and political factors which affect this sphere of interaction externally. Moreover, they eventually lead to a lowering threshold and a lack of deterrence for contact between "ordinary" citizens" and extremist networks (Koehler, 2018). More precisely, those factors create increasingly open and fluid crosscuttings between the far-right landscape and

mainstream society, whereby "ordinary citizens get in touch with either the physical side (e.g. long-term members at demonstrations) or the psychological side (e.g. ideology through literature or social media) of extremist networks. Within those crosscuttings, "ordinary" citizens gain the opportunity to internalise extremist ideology and to participate in extremist action without becoming an organisationally embedded member of the movement (ibid.). In other words, they experience the transmission of grievances, opportunities and polarisation within those radical contrast societies, without being a committed insider (ibid; see also Ravndal, 2018).

Koehler thus provides a highly promising starting point for the exploration of hive terrorism as well as for the combination of social movement and terrorism approaches. His strict macro-level focus, however, limits the explanatory power of his model. Although broadly addressing subcultural changes concerning the Old-Right, i.e. the sphere of neo-Nazism, both mainstream society and far-right radical social movements are mostly treated as black boxes. This in return almost makes them appear as passive bystanders whereby specifically the far-right seems to somehow inadvertently benefit from favourable circumstances. Acknowledging those limitations, Koehler himself calls for further research and advancement of his model. He emphasises the need to broaden its scope towards the meso- and micro-levels of analysis as well as towards other far-right actors apart from the Old-Right (Koehler, 2018).

1.2   Research Question and Hypothesis

Following this call for research, the present thesis aims at analysing the impact of the populist far-right network on the emergence of hive terrorism in Germany. More specifically, it suggests that the populist far-right radical social movement, in fact, actively exploits political and societal macro-level developments: It intentionally creates infrastructural and ideological crosscuttings between their movement and mainstream society through "mainstreaming their beliefs". Instead of being passive bystanders the populist far-right is a key player in lowering the thresholds for contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist networks. It, therefore, increases the likelihood of "ordinary" citizens being mobilised to take part in severe acts of violence. Following the research question "*to what extent does the German populist far-right radical social movement actively contribute to the rise of hive terrorism through "mainstreaming their beliefs",* the thesis serves two main research purposes:

First, on a theoretical basis, it aims at further advancing and expanding Koehler's model by shedding light on the previously neglected meso-level of analysis, i.e. the internal affairs of far-right radical social movements. This, for one thing, increases its explanatory value as it substantiates and amends Koehler's macro-level explanations through a meso-level perspective. For another thing, it contributes to the larger academic debate about the combination of social movement and terrorism approaches by introducing a way to theoretically and empirically design such research project.

Second, on a societal basis, the thesis aims at showing that the broader sphere of populist far-right actors in Germany not only forms a densely interconnected radical social movement but also actively creates ideological and infrastructural crosscuttings with mainstream society. Within those processes of interaction, they actively contribute to the "lower(ing) (…) (of) the barriers against using severe forms of violence" (Koehler, 2018, pp. 86) by heavily engaging in the spread of dystopian rhetoric. Specifically, their dystopian rhetoric focusses on the idea of an existential threat to the German society as well as on linguistic violence against perceived enemies. Following Koehler's model, both factors combined eventually lead to an encouragement of "ordinary" citizens (with no previous ties to the organised, militant extreme-right) to take part in severe acts of right-wing terrorism and violence. Identifying and mapping those active mainstreaming strategies − including the intentionally created ideological and infrastructural crosscuttings − could provide valuable insights for the authorities to detect potential target groups (perpetrators and victims) in time. Moreover, such meso-level analysis could contribute to the identification of suitable starting points for the development of societal and political counter measures that aim at increasing the societal resilience to hive terrorism.

1.3   Reading Guide

In a first step the thesis outlines Koehler's theoretical model regarding the emergence of hive terrorism, explains its central ideas and amends it by establishing a framework for a meso-level approach. This encompasses a special focus on the idea of radical social movements, including its relationship to the broader field of social movement theories and the classification of the populist far-right as radical social movement. The theoretical chapter concludes by conceptually clarifying the concept of the radical contrast society, which presents the main arena for the "mainstreaming of the far-right" and by introducing its main mechanisms, namely the movement's infrastructure and its ideology.

Secondly, introducing the reader to the research design of this thesis, the methodology chapter provides insights into the sequential mixed-method strategy applied to target the present research question. To gain insights into the infrastructure of the populist far-right movement, the thesis, on the one hand, conducts a quantitative social network analysis based on 4955 retweets of seven key actors of the far-right in Germany, tweeted between March 1, 2019, and February 28, 2020. The results are visualised using the open-source software GEPHI. On the other hand, exploring the ideological messages and narratives circulating within the network, the thesis employs a qualitative content analysis based on 1928 tweets of five far-right collective actors, tweeted within the same time span.

Thirdly, based on the quantitative and qualitative Twitter-data as well as additional secondary data including reports of governmental, security and watchdog organisations, the thesis analyses the mainstreaming strategies of the populist far-right radical social movement. It puts a special emphasis on recurring patterns as well as the strategical logic behind those patterns in order to detach the results from specific issues and incidents and create a bigger picture which can be applied to far-right action in the future.

In a last and fourth step, those results are used to draw conclusions about the contributions of the populist far-right network to the emergence of hive terrorism in Germany.

2 Theoretical Framework and Body of Knowledge

2.1 The Concept of Hive Terrorism

Recently introduced by Koehler, the concept of "hive terrorism" aims at providing a theoretical explanation for the increasing involvement of "ordinary" citizens, with no previous ties to the extreme right, in severe acts of right-wing terrorism and violence (Koehler, 2018). Hive terrorism is understood as "fluid networks centred around shared opposition to democratic government and immigration and mobilizing activists from mainstream society more or less spontaneously for terrorist and other violent acts" (Koehler, 2018, pp. 74).

Looking at its components, the term "hive" points towards the varying composition of the networks, whereby the nature of the groups and individuals involved is highly dynamic and

constantly changing. It thus emphasises the absence of strategic long-term planning and organisational embeddedness of the perpetrators. The term "terrorism" refers to the form of violence applied by "ordinary" citizens (ibid.). Although acknowledging the ongoing conceptual debates in the field, Koehler, in this context, draws on Alex Schmid's "Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism". Alex Schmid understands terrorism as "a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence" and, for another thing, as "a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties." (Schmid, 2011, pp. 86-87)

There are two main manifestations of "hive terrorism": First, encouraged by emotions such as fear or panic, "ordinary" individuals spontaneously (and on their own) decide to attack what they perceive as existential threats to themselves or society. This might include individuals such as refugees, politicians, activists, or buildings such as refugee homes, mosques and synagogues. Secondly, often based on strategic calculations of extremist groups, "ordinary" citizens who are not yet known by the authorities, are spontaneously recruited and mobilised to take part in violent plots together with long-term extremists. Extremist groups are therefore able to increase their manpower without admitting outsiders to their inner circle, as this often involves a high risk of detection (Koehler, 2018).

According to Koehler, the emergence of hive terrorism requires a combination of societal and political factors which lead to a lowering threshold and lack of deterrence for contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist networks (Koehler, 2018). More specifically, he argues that modern "radical social movements" provide increasingly open and fluid entry and exit points, whereby "ordinary" citizens can get in touch with either the physical (e.g. long-term members at demonstrations) or the psychological side (e.g. ideology through literature or social media) of extremist networks. Within those processes of "interaction between radical social movements and their surrounding societies" (ibid., pp. 75) (defined by Koehler as radical contrast society), "ordinary" citizens gain the opportunity to internalise extremist ideology and to participate in extremist action without becoming an organisationally embedded member of the movement (ibid.). In other words, they experience the transmission of grievances, opportunities and polarisation within those radical contrast societies without being a committed insider (ibid; see also Ravndal, 2018). Due to Koehler

the more open and public those processes of interaction the higher the chances for "ordinary" citizens to internalise extremist ideology and to engage in spontaneous acts of right-wing terrorism and violence. Moreover, the more fluid and dynamic the composure of those radical social movements, the more difficult it gets for the authorities to detect high-risk violent radicalisation (Koehler, 2018).

Central to Koehler's theory is the idea that certain societal and political factors facilitate crosscuttings between "ordinary" citizens and radical contrast societies (i.e. the sphere of interaction between the radical social movement and the surrounding societies), which then lead to direct contact between those citizens and extremist beliefs and individuals (Koehler, 2018). Applying his theoretical considerations to the rise of hive terrorism in Germany between 2015 and 2018, Koehler names three key factors: First, he holds that the influx of refugees during the so-called migration crisis in 2015 resulted in the growing popularity of nativist sentiments within the society, which boosted the societal relevance of far-right parties, groups and individuals. Moreover, it caused a thematic overlapping between conservatism and far-right beliefs, which led to large scale protests whereby extreme right activists marched alongside "ordinary" citizens and conservative politicians (ibid.). In 2015, for example, the far-right "PEGIDA" - demonstrations had a weekly average of over 20 000 attendees (Pfahl-Traughber, Pegida - eine Protestbewegung zwischen Ängsten und Ressentiments (II), 2016). Due to Koehler, looking at acts of hive terrorism between 2015 and 2017, there is strong evidence that several "ordinary" citizens got in touch with extremist beliefs and individuals at those demonstrations (2018).

Second, given the negligence of German authorities to label right-wing violence as "terrorism", Koehler finds a lack of deterrence to attend far-right events, such as the PEGIDA-marches, or to consume and spread far-right ideas, beliefs and conspiracy theories. Moreover, extremist beliefs (and solutions) are even trivialised and de-stigmatised (ibid.). This in return goes hand in hand with the afore-mentioned, as both combined leads to increasing societal acceptance and "demand"[1] (Mudde, 2010, pp. 1172) for far-right ideas.

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[1] Although the use of economic demand- and supply-side terminology within the research of the far-right is highly controversial and not explicitly coined by Koehler, but rather in relation to far-right electoral successes by Mudde et. al., in this context the terminology seems advantageous in order to clarify the theoretical focus of the thesis.

Third, looking at the supply-side, Koehler (2018) recognises significant changes to the far-right electoral and protest arena. Since electoral support for extreme-right-wing parties decreased, far-right actors were increasingly forced to turn towards the realm of grassroot politics and activism for recruitment and mobilisation. While this trend towards far-right activism and grassroot politics has been recognised by a broad range of other scholars in the field (e.g. Miller-Idriss, 2017; Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019; Quent, 2019b), from today's perspective Koehler's assessment from 2018 (publication date of his study) needs to be slightly updated. Although, in fact, the electoral support for the extreme-right party "NPD" has further decreased, the populist far-right AfD has been able to constantly achieve high results at the polls (see Figure 2). In addition, only recently the BfV confirmed that certain individuals and sections within the AfD have pursued right-wing extremist ideologies (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2020). Therefore, notwithstanding Koehler's findings regarding the increasing importance of grassroot politics and activism, electoral support for right-wing extremist parties did not generally increase. Instead it moved from the Old-Right, i.e. neo-Nazi parties, to the populist far-right, which, despite showing different ideological characteristics, can still (in parts) be considered right-wing extremist.

Figure 2: Rise of the AfD
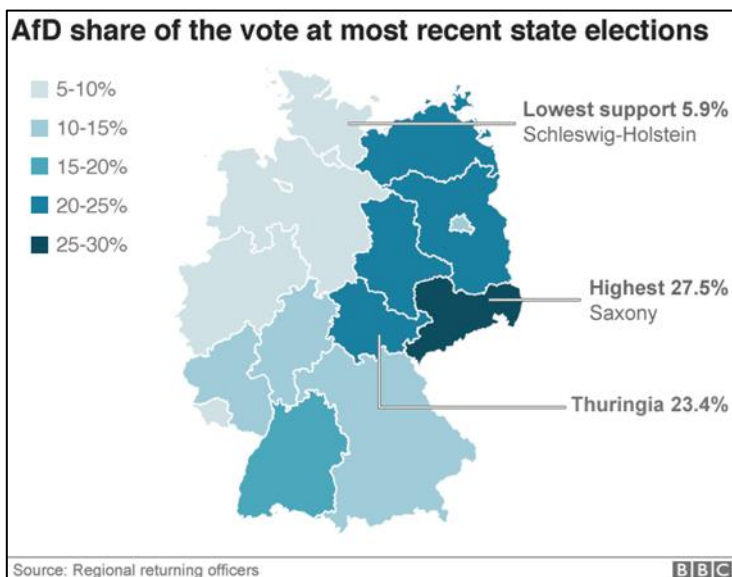
Source: BBC, 2019

Building on Koehler's theoretical and empirical spadework in the field, the thesis aims at advancing his research by going beyond an analysis of the broader socio-political and institutional settings which affect the relationship between "ordinary" citizens and radical

social movements externally, towards an in-depth understanding of the nature of the movement itself. More specifically, by shifting the level of analysis from the macro- to the meso-level, it aims at providing empirical evidence for the active contributions of the populist far-right network to the emergence of hive terrorism. Through mainstreaming their beliefs, they seem to create infrastructural and ideological crosscuttings with mainstream society. Those crosscuttings not only lower the thresholds for contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist networks but also facilitate the transmittance of grievances, polarisation and opportunities through those crosscuttings. The theoretical focus is hence on the supply-side of Koehler's model which in return leads to a special emphasis on the movement's infrastructure and ideology as well as the way it interacts with mainstream society and "ordinary" citizens, i.e. its performance within the radical contrast society (see Figure 3). While given those research objectives, the thesis can thus neither provide empirical proof for Koehler's macro-level findings nor for his model in its entirety. It, however, contributes to the explanatory power of Koehler's model by exploring a specific part of the model which has previously been neglected. The following chapters provide a theoretical framework for a meso-level approach to the emergence of hive terrorism.

Figure 3: Theoretical Focus
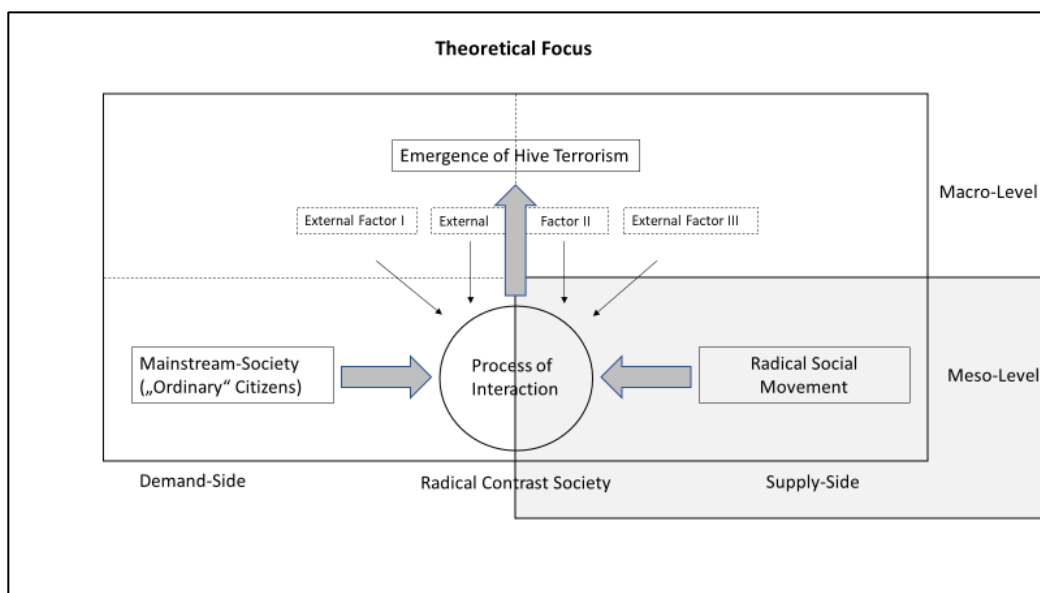
Design: Author's work, conceptually based on Koehler (2018) and Mudde (2010)

2.2 The Nature of Radical Social Movements

2.2.1 Radical Social Movements and Social Movement Theories

Combining elements of Yinger's theory of counterculture and Diani's definition of social movements, Koehler defines radical social movements as "networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations having the character of a counterculture with the primary goal to influence (positively or negatively), fundamentally alter, or destroy a specified target society on the basis of a religious or political ideology, using all available means, legal and illegal, including the strategic use of violence, to fulfil and realise the ideologically corrected or purified version of the target society" (2018, pp. 21). On the one hand, radical social movements are akin to countercultures in that they are fundamentally in conflict with the values of the dominant society. On the other hand, they show typical social movement characteristics, as they include subcultural elements, collective identity formation and networking mechanisms. Moreover, radical social movements are explicitly defined to include both political as well as religious radical groups (ibid.).

By both synergising counterculture and social movement theories as well as including political and religious groups into his understanding of radical social movements, Koehler joins a growing notion in the literature aiming at broadening the scope of social movement research towards more radical forms of protest. Traditionally, social movement researchers have been largely preoccupied with the study of left-wing/labour and progressive mobilisations, while neglecting other forms of (radical) protest including far-right and religious groups (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). As a result, to date, there are still many definitions and concepts within the social movement literature which almost uniquely fit progressive/ reformist groups and democratic types of protest (ibid.). According to Schedler (2016), this development is largely based on the prevalence of the so-called new social movement theories, which have been the dominant academic approach in the European literature on social movements in the 1980s and 1990s. As opposed to structural theories such as the "political opportunity approach" or the "resource mobilisation"- approach, new social movement theories highlight the role of post-material conflicts in a post-industrial society which replaced the material labour conflicts of the early 20th century (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Due to Melucci (1994), who has been considered one of the most influential proponents of the approach, new social movements are mainly about the quality of life,

individual self-realisation and human rights, instead of economic or politic conflicts. As a consequence, since then, social movements have not only been widely associated with progressive societal change but were also viewed as an essential part of democratic culture and participation. Examples for such new social movements include the women's movement, the environmental movement, the peace movements or LGBTQ-rights movements (Schedler, 2016).

In recent years, however, a growing number of scholars have challenged this (one-sided) understanding by claiming that violent, clandestine or radical groups also show characteristics of social movements. They have gone even further by arguing that to properly assess and understand the beliefs and behaviour of radical networks, including the use of violence, social movement approaches are highly promising. Viewing terrorism as a type of protest and a form of collective action, Beck (2008), for example, argues that terrorist groups, similar to social movements, have collective identities and are organised in networks which are crucial for commitment and recruitment. In the context of the far-right, Castelli Gattinara and Pirro (2018), in addition, claim that far-right groups have become akin to "Green/left-wing liberals" in relation to how they emerge and mobilise, i.e. the use of informal procedures and structures, based on a common identity. Referring to its desire for political change and the emphasis on its political nature, Karagiannis (2009), moreover, considers Political Islam a social movement. To understand the behaviour of its social movement organisations, including for example the Hezbollah, he deems social movement approaches inevitable (ibid.).

This attempt to broaden the scope of social movement theories, in return, has been met with resistance by traditional social movement scholars. On the one hand, they have often criticised the approach for equating racist, reactionary or violent forms of mobilisation with progressive and emancipatory movements, thus trivialising the threat posed by such groups (Butterwege, 1996). On the other hand, since long neglected by social movement scholars, most researchers struggle to conceptually include radical groups into traditional social movement definitions and frameworks. Although many definitions of social movements include a form of "political and cultural conflict" (Diani as quoted in Koehler, 2018, pp. 20), they usually do not refer to groups and networks whose ideology is fundamentally anti-democratic. In other words, since their understanding of social movements is that of democratic and progressive movements, they would not regard those networks as social

movements which aim at fundamentally altering or even destroying surrounding societies. Therefore, using conventional social movement approaches and definitions for radical, violent or clandestine political and religious groups not only meets with resistance by other scholars, but also strongly overstretches those concepts.

Returning to Koehler's definition of radical social movements, he seems to have found a compromise between both sides. For one thing, by designing a new definition properly tailored to radical social movements, Koehler avoids overstretching conventional social movement concepts. Through the combination of counterculture theory and Diani's popular definition of a social movement, he integrates the idea of fundamental ideological opposition to the dominant society into his definition without losing the analytical connection to social movement theories. On the other hand, referring to the acceptance of "all available means" Koehler appropriately distinguishes radical social movements from other social movements. He, therefore, successfully counters criticism regarding an alleged equation of racist movement with progressive movements. Last but not least, by creating a new theoretical model limited to radical social movements, he provides a strong theoretical framework for comparison between such movements, irrespectively of their ideological shade (Koehler, 2018). As opposed to conventional social movement theories, this, for example, allows for an analytically clear comparison between left-wing, right-wing, environmentalist and Jihadist radical groups. Koehler's understanding of radical social movements thus not only provides an excellent theoretical framework for this study but also for further social movement research on radical networks.

2.2.2 The Populist Far-Right as Radical Social Movement

Following Koehler's approach towards radical social movements, the thesis hence understands the German populist far-right as a network of different actors, including groups, individuals and organisations. It is a network which aims at influencing, fundamentally altering or even destroying a specific target society, using all available means (Koehler, 2018). The thesis moreover suggests that the network of populist far-right actors is based on a form of collective identity as well as on stable and durable networking mechanisms. Specifically the latter will be further explained, analysed and empirically substantiated later in the thesis. At this point, however, it seems crucial to shortly frame the (ideological) network of actors which the thesis focusses on.

In line with Koehler, there is no such thing as a single, homogenous far-right movement in Germany (ibid.). Instead, given its structural and ideological heterogeneity, the contemporary far-right landscape consists of various co-existing radical social movements as well as independent parties, groups and individuals (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). While all of them, by definition, share a common adherence to far-right beliefs and behaviour, they differ regarding their particular interpretation of far-rightness as well as their objectives, means and strategies. The present thesis focusses on far-right populism, i.e. the sphere of populist far-right actors. Before discussing populism as defining property of the network under study, the following paragraph provides a brief introduction to the thesis' understanding of far-rightness.

This can best be achieved by drawing on the rich body of academic literature regarding the ideological core of far-rightness. While applying social movement theories to the far-right has long been a neglected approach, there has been extensive theorising research on the ideology of far-right parties, groups and individuals. The abundance of academic literature in the field, however, does not necessarily mean that there was such thing as a "clear-cut consensus" (Berntzen, 2018, pp. 12) on the common characteristics of far-rightness. On the contrary, the contemporary academic debate is not only highly complex but also shaped by ongoing conceptual ambiguity. Similar to the public debate, the term "far-right" is often employed interchangeably with other concepts such as right-wing radicalism, right-wing extremism and right-wing populism, which are themselves "issues of contention" (Carter, 2018, pp. 4).

In line with Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, this thesis understands "far-right" as an umbrella term which describes the heterogenous political and ideological landscape located on the (far) right of the historic left-right continuum (2019). "Far-right" is thus a "conceptual container" (Berntzen, 2018, pp. 12) used to pool collective actors, including political parties, groups, and individuals with a "right-wing" ideology. The idea of rightness or right-wing originates from the French Revolution and is traditionally distinguished from the "left" based on their socio-economic views, i.e. egalitarianism or universalism (economic socialism) versus non-egalitarianism or particularism (economic liberalism) (Bjorgo & Ravndal, 2019). Since contemporary far-right actors seem to be primarily concerned with socio-cultural issues such as national identity, immigration policy or religious homogeneity, this distinction, however, presents a "rather unhelpful tool" (Carter, 2018, pp.5). Instead, today's

cleavage between left and right seems to run alongside socio-cultural issues such as globalism, pluralism and multiculturalism. This, in return, suggests that the ideological core of contemporary far-rightness is constituted by socio-cultural characteristics (Rydgren, 2007).

When looking for such features, Cas Mudde's landmark study on the right-wing party family provides an excellent starting point. Analysing more than 26 definitions of right-wing radicalism/extremism, he identifies the following five determining characteristics of far-rightness mentioned most commonly in literature: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and the strong state/authoritarianism (Mudde, 2000). Looking at other influential definitions in the field, while Carter, for example, proposes authoritarianism, anti-democracy and nationalism as "defining properties" (2018, pp. 15) of right-wing radicalism/extremism. Bjorgo and Ravndal consider both authoritarianism and nativism the defining ideological characteristics (2019). Pursuing a more minimalistic approach, Berntzen as well as Castelli Gattinara and Pirro solely refer to nativism as the common ideological denominator of far-right actors (2018; 2019). The far-right is thus most commonly associated with the ideological attributes of authoritarianism, nationalism and nativism. However, an actor does not necessarily need to show all characteristics to the same extent to be considered far-right. On the contrary, given their heterogeneity, far-right parties, groups and individuals present very different combinations of those ideological features: They depend amongst others on their location, societal/political environment, history, objectives or strategic focus.

Returning to the network under study, the populist far-right, by implication, shows a populist element beyond those ideological features. This distinguishes it from other far-right movements, groups and individuals. Similar to the term far-right, the concept of populism is subject to a highly intense academic debate. Scholars not only discuss the concept's definition and demarcations but even question its usefulness as such (Mudde, 2017). In line with Mudde, without attempting to meddle into overly conceptual debates, populism can be broadly understood as the view that society is "ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the pure people against the corrupt elite, and (…) that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (ibid., pp. 3). In other words, populism includes the idea of a societal dichotomy, in which the power of the common people challenges the legitimacy of a "corrupt" political establishment (Abt & Rummens, 2007, pp. 407). Based on the fundamental distrust of formal social institutions

including established political parties, media, the education system and financial institutions, populists argue that the elites are not able (or willing) to act in accordance with the alleged general will of the people. Since this will, however, arises from the purity and the homogeneity of the people, it presents common sense and thus the only logical political behaviour (Rydgren, 2017). Any course of action that deteriorates from the general will is seen as special-interest politics and further proof for the corruptness of the establishment (Mudde, 2017). Populists, moreover, see themselves as the only legitimate representatives of this general will. Based on the idea that people are fully unified, any internal division is rejected as irrelevant or artificial. Oppositional forces, therefore, are not only considered illegitimate but also often excluded from the "morally proper people" and viewed as part of the establishment. Populists present themselves as the "real champions of true democracy" (Rydgren, 2007, pp. 246), whereas the others (i.e. elites, opposition, media) are deemed undemocratic. As a consequence, populists are not only anti-elitists but also anti-pluralists (Müller, 2016).

As opposed to the defining ideological characteristics of far-rightness mentioned above, populism does not necessarily present a full (thick) ideology but rather a thin-centred ideology, respectively a political discourse style (Rydgren, 2017). Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013), for example, hold that even though populism establishes a dichotomous vision of society and proposes the general will as the most appropriate source of power, it seldomly offers specific solutions for main socio-political issues. Instead, populism is usually attached or even assimilated to a so-called host ideology which equips the populist with a broader range of views on economical, societal and political topics. More specifically, as a thin-centred ideology, it could be attached to any "full" ideology, whereby the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" can be understood as "empty vessels, filled in different ways by different actors" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, pp. 151). Actors are thus not necessarily populist per se, but instead, they behave "populist" at a certain time and space. Therefore, populism is not necessarily a worldview but rather a specific political strategy applied in a certain situation to "pit (…) the people against the elites" (Hawkins as quoted in Rydgren, 2017, pp. 492).

To provide an example, populist far-right actors would often use populist rhetoric in combination with a nativist ideology (Rydgren, 2007): They understand "the people" in a nostalgic, reactionist and most importantly exclusionary way. Although socio-economically

propagating a classless society (i.e. referring to the "ordinary man" instead of the "working man"), far-right populists exclude entire groups of individuals from their perception of a homogenous and monolithic people (Taggart, 2000). Besides the political and cultural elites, such exclusion might affect immigrants, ethnic minorities, or perceived "traitors" which are accused of fundamentally transgressing the alleged volontè générale (Canovan, 1999). This, for example, encompasses the so-called "political correctness elite" and the socio-cultural left, whose cosmopolitan, liberal and multicultural values fundamentally contradict with the anti-pluralist worldview of the populist far-right. Moreover, together with the political establishment those actors are considered enemies of the people as their political views are deemed responsible for an alleged deterioration of national and cultural homogeneity as well as the prerogative of the native (Müller, 2016). Such populist far-right rhetoric can be found within PEGIDA's demonstrations, where German chancellor Angela Merkel is frequently called a "Volksverräter" (Engl.: traitor of the people) (see Figure 2). Moreover, this thinking is highly present within far-right anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Following age-old anti-Semitic stereotypes they view Jews as the political and financial elite, secretly controlling the media, the financial markets and eventually aiming at dominating the world (Quent, 2019b).

Figure 4: Far-Right Populism

"Volksverräterin"-sign displayed at a PEGIDA-rally in Dresden in 2016.

Source: https://www.nordbayern.de/politik/die-sprach-prugler-1.5757397

To sum up, the present thesis focusses on the network of authoritarian, nationalist, nativist parties, groups and individuals in Germany, who distinguish themselves from other far-right movements through combining their underlying ideology with populist political tools and discourse strategies.

2.3   The Mainstreaming of the Far Right and the Radical Contrast Society

Taking the argument back to Koehler's theoretical model, the thesis aims at exploring how the populist far-right radical social movement contributes to the emergence of hive terrorism, i.e. the facilitation of contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremism through mainstreaming their beliefs. Therefore, before discussing the methods, the "mainstreaming of the far-right" – concept needs to be theoretically framed and located within Koehler's theoretical model.

In today's academic and public debate the term refers to two interdependent but distinct political and societal developments: On the one hand, scholars including Miller-Idriss (2017) and Quent (2019b) employ the term to describe the attempts of the contemporary far-right to strip off their image as a fringe subculture and to join "mainstream" (popular) culture. In this context, the mainstreaming of the far-right refers to adjustments in relation to discourse strategies, appearances and forms of protest of far-right parties, groups and individuals, following the goal of increasing the societal acceptance for far-right (radical/extreme) behaviour and beliefs. Within this understanding, the term "mainstreaming" therefore presents an action, behaviour or strategy, located on the supply-side of Koehler's theoretical model. On the other hand, Caiani & Kröll (2015) and Hafez (2014), amongst others, use the idea of the mainstreaming of the far-right to draw attention to the growing societal receptiveness for anti-immigrant, anti-pluralist and euro-sceptic sentiments in contemporary European societies. In line with Koehler's macro-level findings in the context of the emergence of hive terrorism, they specifically highlight anti-Muslim attitudes which have gained further popularity in wake of the so-called European migration crisis in 2015 (Hafez, 2015). As opposed to the former, this understanding of the mainstreaming of the far-right is located on the demand-side of Koehler's theoretical model.

Following the theoretical developments made in the previous chapters, the thesis focusses on understanding the mainstreaming of the far-right as an action, behaviour or strategy of the populist far-right. As illustrated in Figure 3 (chapter 2.1), the focus lies on the meso-level of analysis and more specifically on the supply-side of Koehler's model, whereby the

thesis aims at exploring how the far right actively contributes to "lowering the thresholds for contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist individuals and beliefs. In accordance with the research question and the hypothesis, it is necessary to analyse to what extent the mainstreaming of the far-right presents such active contribution.

2.3.1 The Radical Contrast Society

This analysis, in return, requires an in-depth discussion of the infrastructure and the ideology of the populist far-right radical social movement in Germany. Following the assumption that the mainstreaming of the far-right is an action, which by definition, requires a form of interaction with surrounding societies, it takes place within the Radical Contrast Society, which forms the very heart of Koehler's theoretical model of the emergence of hive terrorism (see Figure 1) (Koehler, 2018). According to him the term radical contrast society is defined as the "mechanisms involved within the social system (including infrastructure and ideology) of interaction between radical social movements and their surrounding societies" (ibid., pp. 30).

Figure 5: The Radical Contrast Society

Source: Koehler, 2018, pp. 14

The performance of the radical social movement in the radical contrast society, in return, is determined by its infrastructure and ideology (see Figure 2). Therefore, all attempts to actively facilitate contact with "ordinary" citizens (including the mainstreaming of far-right behaviour and beliefs) necessarily involve adjustments in relation to their infrastructure or the way they transport their ideology (ibid.). In other words, the mainstreaming of the far-

right is expressed through adjustments in relation to the movement's infrastructure and ideology. Given their relevance, the terms on the following pages are conceptualised to serve as guiding elements in the thesis's analysis.

2.3.2 Infrastructure

The movement's infrastructure encompasses "all visible elements attributed to the movement" (Koehler, 2018, pp. 24) including its hierarchy, activities and appearance. Following this thought, it is necessary to distinguish between three main categories, which are however not conclusive but rather overlapping and dynamic: First, *events* form the very heart of the movement's bonding and networking activities. Reaching from concerts, rallies and readings to terrorist attacks or other violent attacks on enemies, events provide an opportunity for the movement's members to connect, bond and to form/ maintain a collective identity. Moreover, through events, the movement creates visible points of contact for the interaction with the target society, which is deemed essential for the transportation of ideology as well as recruitment processes (Koehler, 2018). Second, closely linked to the former, the movement's *economic infrastructure* refers to the financial network created by the movement to secure its operability. Potential sources of income include donations, the sale of music, literature and merchandise as well as profits of readings, conferences or workshops (ibid.). Third, *corporate design* describes the movement's visual appearance and aesthetics, including the use of logos, symbols, certain "styles" or specific rituals. A common form of appearance is seen as a prerequisite for the formation of a collective identity, i.e. "a movement-specific way of life" (Koehler, 2018, pp. 24). Moreover, the movement's corporate design presents a powerful tool to define the relationship to the target society as it can either be used to attach or to differentiate itself from the dominant way of life. While attachment can be achieved through the adaption of certain positive cultural elements of the target society, e.g. traditional costumes, pop-culture or symbols, differentiation often encompasses fringe, subcultural appearances and behaviour.

By providing visibility, collective identity, operability and (stylistic) principles, the movement's infrastructure is thus essential for both internal and external affairs of the radical social movement. In other words, it presents the movement's "hardware" (ibid, pp.24).

2.3.3 Ideology

The movement's ideology, defined as "particular clustered sets of political concepts (Freeden as quoted in Koehler, 2018, pp. 28), determines the way the movement perceives

and classifies its surrounding environment. By structuring and assigning meaning to macro-social and macro-political developments and concepts, defining areas of interest and providing a logic behind the movement's objectives, it serves as a common denominator for the movement (Koehler, 2018). While ideology is certainly a dynamic and flexible system, which neither requires unanimity nor coherence with behaviour and actions at all time, it still defines a minimal consensus that characterises the movement and its members (ibid.). Moreover, substantiating this internal alignment, ideology forms the very basis for the movement's understanding of the target society. It structures the surrounding societies and defines the parts of it which the movement aims at influencing, altering or destroying (i.e. the target society). Once defined, it partially characterises the target society as either positive or negative. While the positive part needs to be won over, convinced and eventually integrated into the radical social movement itself, the negative part presents the enemy who keeps the radical movement from achieving their version of an ideologically corrected or purified society (ibid, pp. 21). As a result, it is also the ideology itself that distinguishes the radical social movement from its surrounding societies and especially the target society. To use counterculture-wording, the movement's ideology typically cannot coexist with the ideologies of the (negative) target society. The movement hence enters into a (violent and non-violent) competition of ideologies with the surrounding societies, "struggl(ing) over the legitimate meanings of political concepts and the sustaining arrangements they form" (ibid, pp. 27). For this mutual competition of ideologies, the radical contrast society presents the main arena.

In social movement literature, the concept of ideology has often been rejected as "too monolithic" (Caiani & Della Porta, 2011, pp. 183), too untidy to be useful in the context of social movements. Instead, the idea of frames and framing processes gained wide-spread popularity since the 1990s (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Based on the assumption that meanings and beliefs do not automatically arise out of structural arrangements but rather require agency and participation, Benford and Snow, for example, regard so-called collective action frames as the very heart of social movements (2000). According to them collective action frames are understood as "action-oriented set(s) of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement (…)" (ibid., pp. 614). Collective action frames thus diagnose a specific problem, outline potential solutions and motivate the addressees for action. Notwithstanding the importance of those framing processes in social movement dynamics, nowadays most scholars agree that they require

some form of background culture, logic or belief system themselves (Koehler, 2018). Since collective action frames are situational assignments of meaning to a specific problem, there needs to be some form of guiding principle which provides a more or less coherent framework for the selection of problems to address as well as the type of solutions proposed (ibid.). As a consequence, the concept of framing cannot entirely replace the above-named functions of a movement's ideology, but rather describes a way ideology is applied, communicated and executed in a specific situation. This, in return, suggests that the nature of the ongoing debate about the usefulness of the concept of ideology in social movement theories is mainly terminological. In other words, instead of challenging the existence of some form of guiding belief system, scholars question the label "ideology" itself and propose competing terms such as "culture", "logic" or "set of beliefs". While acknowledging the contributions to this debate, its depiction would, however, exceed the extent of this paper. Moreover, since it not necessarily impacts the very nature of social movements, in line with Koehler, it seems fair to remain with the use of the term "ideology" for the sake of this paper.

To sum up, the concepts of ideology and collective action frames are not mutually exclusive but rather interdependent. Ideology one the one hand "provides everything necessary for the framing process, including legitimate and illegitimate words to use, situations and conditions of interest and the logic behind what meaning is assigned to which phenomenon" (ibid., pp. 26). Guided by the movement's ideology, collective action frames, on the other hand, interpret specific situations, communicate them to the members of the movements as well as to the target society and propose specific solutions. Together they thus form the movement's "software".

2.3.4 The "Mainstream"

Finally, any discussion of the "mainstreaming" of a phenomenon is predicated on the researcher's understanding of the "mainstream". Although the idea of "mainstreaming" is highly present in the contemporary literature on the far-right, scholars seldomly define the core characteristics of the societal or political "mainstream" (Miller-Idriss, 2017). Instead, the term is often framed as a "shifting spectrum against which (…) subcultural scenes position themselves" (ibid., pp. 17). The "mainstream" thus appears as a fluid and dynamic entity which largely depends on the perception of the specific movement, party, group, or individual (ibid.). While this (sociological) understanding certainly enfolds some relevance for the present research project especially in relation to the populist far-right's subjective

definition of its target society, the thesis however focusses on a slightly different approach which originates from political science literature.

Closely connected to the notions of the "political centre" or the "political middle ground", the term "mainstream" in this context describes the political and (societal) sphere of movements, parties, groups and individuals, which are characterised by their adherence to the so-called free democratic basic order: Despite differing ideologies, objectives, appearances and strategies, they are united by their respect for the main principles of democracy. This idea of a democratic mainstream does not necessarily withstand the sociological perspective, but rather applies a different conceptual angle. Instead of focussing on specific cultural or stylistic features, it focusses on the actor's relationship to the free democratic order. Moreover, it shifts the focus away from the actor's subjective perception of the mainstream towards an outsider evaluation of the actor's compatibility with democratic values. In practice, this leads to a broader understanding of the "mainstream": "Mainstream" in this sense includes a wide range of "fringe" subcultures who consider themselves detached from the societal mainstream and even aim at provoking it. Nevertheless, they are still full members of the democratic mainstream. For example, "punks", "trekkies", "hippies", or "naturists" who distinguish themselves from a perceived mainstream through haircuts, apparel, music or their "lifestyle", do not actively oppose basic democratic values. In fact, they even operate based on their democratic freedom and appreciate their civil liberties, which makes them an essential part of the democratic mainstream.

Given those considerations, outsiders of the democratic consensus are, by implication, characterised by a tensed relationship to basic democratic values. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between radicalism and extremism. While radicals aim at changing the political and societal status quo without rejecting democracy per se, extremists act in direct opposition to fundamental democratic values and consider the use of violence a legitimate means to achieve their objectives (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). In other words, while radicals aim at getting to "the root of social problems and conflict" (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, 2019, p. 3) without directly opposing the free democratic order, extremists are by nature anti-democratic and plan to abolish basic democratic values (Bötticher, 2017). This distinction has great practical importance, as it determines the state`s and society's relationship to the respective actor (Mudde, 2000).

Simply put, although radicalism, on the one hand, is located at the edges of the democratic consensus, it has a legitimate place in democratic societies and public discourse. Extremism on the other hand, lies outside of the democratic consensus and must not be tolerated as legitimate part of the society. While radicalism must thus be countered through democratic means (i.e. civil society engagement), extremism requires strict intervention under the rule of law (Bötticher, 2017).

Although moving away from the actor's subjective understanding of the mainstream, the approach has sometimes been criticised for its dependency on the researcher's conception of democracy, which itself is considered a highly contested concept (Carter, 2018). Specifically in Western societies, democracy is often equated with the political and societal status quo, respectively the mainstream values and beliefs, without further defining the concept's key characteristics (ibid.). As a result, democracy often appears as a blurry idea, used without conceptual clarity and for ideological purposes only.

This point carries weight, especially when applying the approach to the far-right. Following the idea of the "democratic mainstream", the mainstreaming of the far-right describes the attempt of the far-right radical social movement to embed authoritarian, populist, nativist and nationalist beliefs and behaviour in the political and societal democratic consensus. More specifically, it describes the action, behaviour or strategy of adjusting radical or extreme infrastructure and ideology in a way that makes them appear less radical and extreme, i.e. compatible with the free democratic basic order. Far-right actors, therefore, attempt to actively blur the conceptual boundaries of democracy. They challenge the definitions of radicalism and extremism, thereby aiming at stretching the concept of "democracy" towards an inclusion of far-right beliefs and behaviour (Feischmidt & Hervik, 2015). Their strategy is based on a fluid and dynamic understanding of democracy which changes in accordance with the political and societal mainstream. In other words, beliefs and behaviour which are nowadays considered "radical" or "extreme" are supposed to be considered "democratic" in the future after having been successfully mainstreamed.

A theoretical framework able to cope with the far-right strategy, hence, on the one hand requires a robust and well-defined understanding of democracy, which goes beyond short-term developments and trends. On the other hand, however, recalling times when the then-interpretation of democracy led to results strongly contradicting with today's conception of

(liberal) democracy, a static understanding might not be able to cope with important societal problems as well. In Germany, for example, until the 1990s homosexuality was not only stigmatised but even (formally) criminalised by law (former § 175 StGB). Moreover, it was not before 1997 when marital rape became a crime (former § 177 StGB). Although the German constitution (adopted in 1949) prominently states that "human dignity shall be inviolable" (Article 1), back then LGBT-rights activists as well as feminist activists were often referred to as radicals located at the edges of the democratic consensus (Könne, 2018). Similar to that, during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, activists were commonly seen as radicals even though from today's perspective one cannot imagine how racial segregation could have been considered compatible with democratic values and the democratic mainstream (Allen, 2000).

This leads to a dilemma. While growing polarisation and the mainstreaming strategies of the contemporary populist far-right surge require a robust and stable understanding of democracy and democratic values, recent history highlights the need for a certain flexibility to acknowledge the changing zeitgeist. The understanding of the free democratic order hence needs to be clear and robust but not unchangeable. Therefore, while acknowledging that the dilemma deserves a deeper discussion than it can be provided within the extent of this study, the present conceptualisation suggests the following: In line with Carter, the free democratic order is understood as "a belief in the value of diversity and hence tolerance of difference (pluralism), the principle of political equality (fundamental equality of human beings) and the valuing of and the respect for civil and political freedoms" (2018, pp. 11), safeguarded through the rule of law. Moreover, since this thesis analyses far-right collective action in Germany, it adopts the constitutional approach of German scholars, balancing the concepts of radicalism and extremism against the German constitution (Mudde, 2000). Especially in the light of the above, this seems valuable, as the constitution presents a robust framework which outlasts short-term trends but is not fundamentally unchangeable.

3   Research Design, Methods and Sources

As outlined in the previous chapters, the thesis aims at exploring the supply-side of Koehler's theoretical model regarding the emergence of hive terrorism in Germany. The thesis focusses on the far-right's active contributions to the lowering of the thresholds for contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist individuals and beliefs – an issue which was largely

neglected in the past. More specifically, it concentrates on the mainstreaming strategies of the populist far-right radical social movement and its contributions to lowering the thresholds for contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist individuals and beliefs. Understood as an action, behaviour or strategy, the mainstreaming of the far-right requires an interaction with the movement's surrounding societies and specifically the target society. Therefore, the analytical focus of this thesis lies on the radical contrast society, which presents the main arena for such interaction. The process of interaction with the target society, in return, takes place through the movement's infrastructure and collective action frames, whereby the latter is guided by the movement's ideology. Consequently, the mainstreaming strategies of the populist far-right are expressed through adjustments in relation to the infrastructure and ideology, which by implication suggests that they become visible and experienceable when identifying mapping and analysing those factors.

3.1   Research Design

So far there has not been such thing as a quantitative data set or a large qualitative study regarding the infrastructure or the ideology of the German populist far-right. Moreover, empirical evidence for the mainstreaming strategies of the populist far-right has been mostly anecdotal. Although some scholars including Miller-Idriss (2017) and Quent (2019a) conducted remarkable micro-level research focussing on individual organisations (e.g. NSU) or specific aspects (e.g. commercialisation of far-right brands, merchandise and appearance), the internal organisational and strategical efforts of the far-right on a meso-level of analysis have been largely ignored. In other words, to date the supply-side of Koehler's theoretical model presents a black box.

When empirically assessing the topic, the process of gathering data and exploring the phenomenon thus needs to start at the very bottom, asking very basic questions about the populist far-right radical social movement. This includes for example the identification of its boundaries (which actors are involved?), its hierarchy (e.g. spokespersons, leaders and other influential actors), its communicational patterns (who talks to whom?), and its sources of information (e.g. newspapers, podcasts). In a second step, those basic findings guide the collection of empirical data about the ideology circulating within and being transported through this infrastructure. Finally, the findings can be searched for structural, behavioural or ideological indicators pointing towards mainstreaming strategies of the populist far-right. Those indicators are then examined, contextualised and compared with secondary data

including academic literature, NGO and government reports as well as micro-level research projects such as Miller-Idriss' and Quent's studies.

To sum up, the research objective thus requires an exploratory, data-driven research design which allows the researcher to follow the data and to continuously react to new (and unexpected) findings and developments in the course of exploring a previously highly under-researched topic.

3.2   Methods

Method-wise the thesis chooses a sequential mixed method strategy, based on quantitative social network analysis and a qualitative content analysis, to explore the infrastructure and the ideology of the populist far-right in Germany. "Mixed methods" refers to the "collecting, analysing, and mixing or integrating (of) both quantitative and qualitative data (…) for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the research problem" (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006, pp. 3). The strategy is sequential in the sense that the qualitative phase builds on the quantitative phase, whereby both phases are distinct. More precisely, the quantitative social network analysis guides the qualitative content analysis by establishing a general understanding of the phenomenon and by pointing towards specific elements which require an in-depth qualitative exploration in order to achieve a more detailed insight (Creswell, 2009).

Considering the research objectives outlined above, such a strategy seems highly promising. For one thing the thesis aims at exploring two interdependent but distinct aspects (i.e. infrastructure and ideology), which require different methods of data collection. A mixed method strategy as a very straight-forward approach does not force the researcher to choose a single method to gather data on both aspects (which might strongly threaten the validity of the findings) but rather enables the researcher to select various methods, specifically tailored to explore the particular aspect under study (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). It thus grants the researcher a form of methodological freedom, leading to more stringent and fitting designs. For another thing, a sequential approach seems mandatory, since the identification of the ideology of a movement requires some basic information about the movement. To be more precise, one cannot identify a movement's ideology without knowing its members, communication channels and sources of information, which means that gathering

quantitative data and mapping the structural cornerstones of the populist far-right movement is prerequisite for collecting qualitative data about what is circulating within the movement.

In the past, the merits of combining quantitative and qualitative methods have been recognised by other scholars studying far-right radical and extreme networks. Joining "network analysis, visualisation, logistic regression and discourse analysis" (2019, pp. 520) Froio and Ganesh, for example, emphasise the value of mixed-method approaches when aiming at identifying network structures and relevant actors as well as key issues and frames. Focussing on the Italian extreme right online network, Tateo (2006) merged an integrated social network analysis with a qualitative content analysis approach. In line with Froio & Ganesh he holds that the combination provides a powerful tool to create a "comprehensive picture" (ibid, par. 7) of the structure and ideology of a particular community. Both scholars agree that an in-depth analysis of the nature of a movement requires more than a single method of data collection.

3.2.1 Social Network Analysis

Guided by those influential studies, the present thesis first conducts a quantitative social network analysis (SNA) aiming at mapping the infrastructure of the populist far-right movement in Germany. Originating from the field of anthropology and later combined with graph theory, SNA approaches have gained widespread popularity over the past years (Tateo, 2006). In social movement research SNA approaches are based on the idea that a movement is constituted by networks of groups and individuals connected through so-called social links, whereby those links are formed by intergroup and interpersonal interaction and communication flows (Caiani & Wagemann, 2009). More specifically, the network is based on various "acts of communication" (ibid., pp. 69) between groups and individuals through which collective action frames, norms and values are developed and diffused. Therefore, identifying, visualising and analysing those communication links , by implication, grants the researcher insight into the real-life structure and agency of a social movement (Hayes, 2001). To put it more technically: When following SNA approaches the network is based on nodes which are linked to other nodes through edges. Once identified, those edges (ties) are awarded a value by the researcher based on pre-defined indicators. The resulting data can then be arranged in a matrix enabling the researcher to run certain algorithms on the data set (Tateo, 2006). Besides the use of algorithms, SNA moreover provides empirical substantiation for the strength of relationships between actors: It visualises the boundaries

of the movement through the value of the edges between the nodes, respectively through the absence or presence of ties. Considering the research objective, namely the exploration of the infrastructure of the German far-right, the SNA approach thus presents a highly promising method, enabling the researcher to gather very detailed empirical data about the (infra-)structure of a radical social movement.

In practice, the thesis therefore operationalises populist far-right parties, groups and individuals in Germany as nodes which are interconnected by (communicational) links. However, when attempting to explore the social links of radical social movements, researchers most commonly encounter severe challenges. Given their volatile and often clandestine nature, radical and extremist networks are generally considered very "difficult objects of empirical investigation" (Caiani & Wagemann, 2009, pp. 70). Since, by definition, being in a tensed relationship with the constitution and hence the authorities, they often attempt to disguise their internal infrastructure, including their leaders, events and economic flows, in order to avoid public exposure or even criminal prosecution. Sometimes you would even find active members of such networks being sworn to some form of secrecy, presenting a main pillar of their group's collective identity (Zhou et. al., 2005). Revisiting the definition of a radical social movement presented earlier in this thesis, they, moreover, view themselves as opposed to a dominant culture whose members are considered outsiders or even enemies of their networks (Koehler, 2018). This antagonistic view specifically includes journalists and researchers, who are often seen as agents of those "enemies" who are prosecuting the movement. Therefore, researchers conducting an interview-based social network analysis, relying on snowball-sampling (each interviewee is asked for social contacts, i.e. ties), would rarely find sufficient interviewees to achieve generalisable results about the structure of a movement of networks. Assuming that they would find a number of interviewees from different organisations and groups, they would, however, still face strong challenges regarding the validity of his/her findings, as one must always start from the premise that the interviewee distorts information or does not tell the entire truth (Khalil, 2017).

Considering the above, a field-based approach to social movement analysis thus did not seem feasible for the purpose of this thesis, specifically for a master student lacking experiences and direct contact with radical or extremist activists. Instead, an opportunity needed to be found to gather information about the social links of the populist far-right from a distance, i.e. from a third-person kind of view. In this context, the far-right's use of so-called

Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and namely their interactions on the online social media platform "Twitter" seemed promising. Twitter is an US-based micro-blogging and social networking service which "allow(s) immediate and widespread information diffusion and offers various means to create information streams and emotions" (Froio & Ganesh, 2019, pp. 519). Its users exchange information through posts (i.e. tweets) and interact with each other through the mechanisms of like and retweet. With more than 330 million active members, producing up to 6000 tweets per second, today Twitter presents one of the most influential social media platforms in the world (Business Insider, 2019). Given this popularity, there is a large consensus among social movement scholars about the central role of Twitter in modern social movements. According to Segerberg et al. (2011), Twitter presents an "organizing mechanism within (…) (a) specific protest ecology" (pp. 201) forming a major tool for transmitting information and structuring relations between members of the movement. In networked protest spaces, Twitter thus serves as a main networking agent allowing for real-time exchange of frames, information sources and mobilisation activities (ibid.). Looking at the sphere of far-right radical and extremist groups, O'Callaghan et al. (2013) confirm these considerations by holding that Twitter interactions within far-right movements strongly contribute to the formation of stable virtual communities, constituting a main hub for the spread of perceived threats, recruitment efforts and the organisation of common (offline) protests. This, in return, corresponds with Caiani & Wagemann's (2009) broader notion about the importance of the internet for contemporary far-right groups. According to them, far-right groups use the virtual space as a "public space of debate" (pp. 68) which allows for the support of allies as well as for interorganisational networking and coordination efforts. Moreover, the internet serves as main arena for the internal formation of a collective identity as well as the spread and multiplication of frames and ideologies. Based on this relevance for contemporary social movements and specifically the far-right, Twitter can therefore be considered a very promising "window on the protest space" (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011, pp. 200), enabling the researcher to identify the structure and agency of the far-right movement.

The thesis thus operationalises the Twitter accounts of German populist far-right parties, groups and individuals as nodes. Those nodes are interconnected through the communicational link of retweeting. Retweeting is a function on Twitter which allows the user to share the tweet of another user with his/her audience. In line with Froio & Ganesh (2019), in the context of social movements retweeting presents the decision of a user to "use

their political agency to broadcast an idea or a statement" (pp. 521) of another user. Even if an idea or statement is negated, broadcasting it requires some form of approval of the contents of the tweet and the intention to broaden the audience of a fellow user. Therefore, following Caiani and Wagemann (2009), retweets seem a valuable "indicator of ideological affinity, common objectives or shared interest between the groups (or individuals)" (pp. 69). More specifically, retweets are thus considered a useful proxy to identify and measure the social links between populist far-right actors on Twitter. In order to receive a more grounded image of the populist far-right image and to rule out potential biases, the thesis focusses on longitudinal data, namely the time span of 1 year (March 1, 2019 – February 28, 2020). This is supposed to detach the data from specific events and issues and thus to allow the researcher to go beyond short-term trends and to concentrate on more durable and stable social links (Froio & Ganesh, 2019).

Given the explorative research design, the thesis, furthermore, chooses a data-driven, inductive sampling strategy based on a snowball-sampling approach. Based on governmental reports, academic literature and watchdog organisations, the following four parties, groups and individuals have been pre-selected as initial purposive sample: Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland *(Follower: 29200/ Retweets: 588)*, PEGIDA *(7040/ 1198)*, Sezession im Netz *(7002/ 1596)* and Björn Höcke (AfD) *(40600/ 50)*. Those actors have been identified as both representing the different organisational structures (parties, groups or individuals) as well as the various ideological, strategical and stylistic currents within the populist far-right movement. In the light of the above-named heterogeneity of the far-right landscape this was deemed essential in order to be able to map the movement in its entirety and thus achieve the best possible understanding of its infrastructure. After conducting a pilot study, the populist far-right organisation "EinProzent" (*15100/ 227)* was further added to the sample, following an extraordinarily high number of incoming retweets. Moreover, in order to test the boundaries of the network, the ultra-conservative movement "WerteUnion" *23900/ 396)* within the governing party CDU and the youth organisation "Junge Nationalisten" *(2144/ 954)* of the Neo-Nazi party NPD was chosen to complete the sample. A detailed introduction to the sample can be found within the appendix to this thesis.

Findings

In total, the social network analysis is based on 4955 retweets, sent by 7 far-right actors between March 1, 2019 and February 28, 2020. The retweets have been counted manually,

scrolling down on the Twitter stream (timeline) of the particular party, group or individual. In order to increase the reliability of findings, the process of counting has been conducted twice. The retweeted Twitter accounts have then been entered into a matrix, designed by the open-source software GEPHI. The same tool has been further used to visualise the identified network. Overall, the database includes 502 nodes (representing Twitter accounts) and 646 edges (social links). GEPHI offers a range of layouts, which assisted the researcher in structuring and visualising the network. For the present research purpose, the "Yifan Hu Proportional"-layout designed by Yifan Hu provided the highest analytical value. Combining a force-directed model with a multilevel algorithm, the layout efficiently calculates the distance between the nodes, structures them and models a highly aesthetic graph. Specifically, when planning on analysing specific parts within a large network, a clean graph is crucial in order to identify and appropriately visualise the findings.

Figure 6: Boundaries of the Populist Far-Right Movement
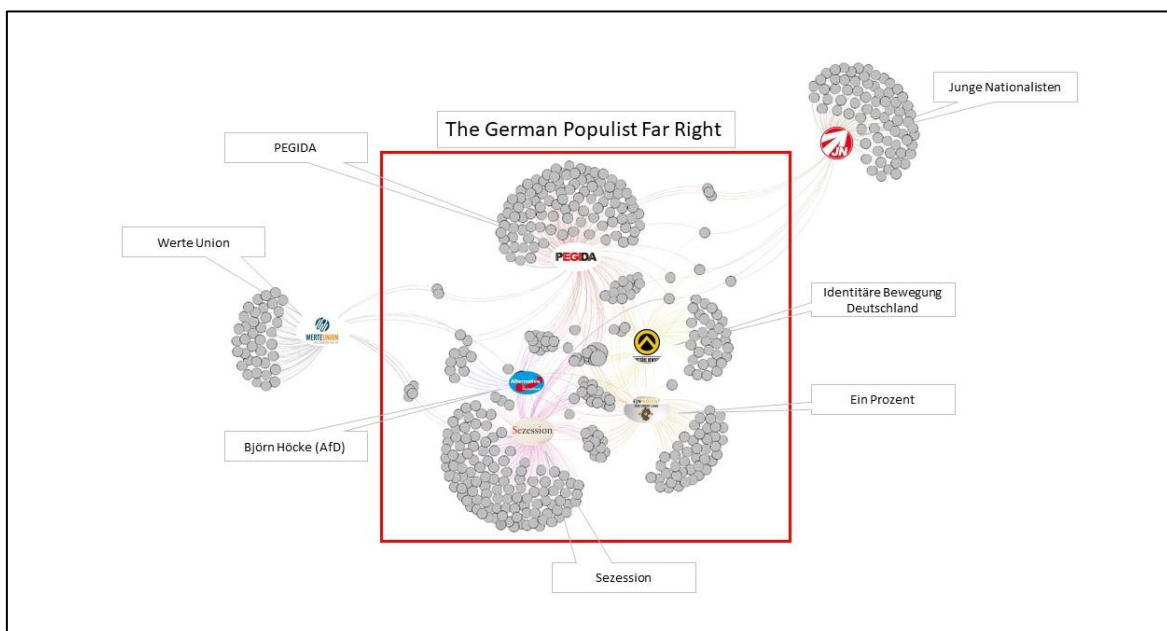
As illustrated in Figure 6, the social network analysis reveals a densely interconnected though heterogenous network of far-right populist actors in Germany with clear boundaries both to the ultra-conservative WerteUnion and to the fascist "Junge Nationalisten". The network is not grouped around a single central node but rather contains a multitude of connecting nodes ("brokers") which float in the middle of the network and interlink the different parties, groups and individuals. Categorising and colouring the brokers based on their belonging to a particular party or organisation (e.g. AfD, IBD, IfS), the graph shows a

vivid sphere of interaction (i.e. communicational links) between the pre-selected actors (see Figure 5). As a preliminary result, the social network analysis thus provides empirical evidence for the existence of a densely linked populist far-right network on Twitter. Moreover, it suggests that the selected sample accurately represents this network, since there are no other parties, organisations or (independent) individuals who stand out through receiving an extraordinarily high number of retweets (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: The Populist Far-Right Movement in Detail

The German Populist Far Right

	Twitter Account	Retweets	Organisation	Type
1	Benedikt Kaiser	295	IfS	Media
2	EinProzent	285	EinProzent	Activism
3	Ellen Kositza	238	IfS	Media
4	Verlag Antaios	155	IfS	Media
5	Martin Lichtmesz	141	IfS	Media
6	Martin Sellner	122	Identitäre Bewegung	Activism
7	Die Tagesstimme	102	Identitäre Bewegung	Media
8	Recherche Halle	94	EinProzent	Activism
9	Laut Gedacht	80	Identitäre Bewegung	Activism
10	Jonas Schick	76	IfS	Media

Top 10: Twitter Accounts (retweeted by more than one of the selected actors)

Legend:
Colour of edge depends on the organisation the Twitter account is associated with (incoming retweets):

- Identitäre Bewegung
- Institut für Staatspolitik (IfS)
- EinProzent
- Alternative für Deutschland
- PEGIDA
- Other

3.2.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The second, qualitative part of the mixed method strategy aims at exploring the ideology circulating within and being transported through the identified populist far-right network. Building on the findings of the social network analysis, the focus lies on tweets sent by the following five Twitter accounts: IBD, PEGIDA, SiN, Björn Höcke, Ein Prozent. This seems rewarding for two reasons: On the one hand, as shown in Figure 6, those organisations and individuals are not only densely connected but also form the cornerstones of the network. Therefore, their messages seem appropriate proxies to draw conclusions about the ideologies of the network. On the other hand, tweets present the platform's main mechanism for the creation and sharing of user-generated content. Defined as messages "posted to Twitter containing text, photos, a GIF, an/ or video" (Twitter, 2020, par. 1), tweets are often used to spread so-called collective action frames in social movement environments (Froio &

Ganesh, 2019). As outlined in chapter 2.3.3 of this thesis, collective action frames interpret specific situations, communicate them to the members of the movements as well as to the target society and propose specific solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000). The design and message of those collective action frames depends on the movement's ideology which provides "everything necessary for the framing process" (Koehler, 2018, pp. 26) including the guiding logic behind the messages. They are thus the situational application of the movement's ideology, which by implication suggests that one can make inferences from those frames to the movement's underlying ideology.

Method-wise the tweets are analysed using a qualitative content analysis (CA) approach. Dating back to the early 20th century, content analysis as a research technique allows the researcher to reduce large sets of unstructured data to meaningful categories or themes which are directly linked to the research question. In other words, CA presents a helpful tool to systematically identify the meaning of a given unit of analysis (e.g. tweets), take it to a higher level of abstraction and assign it to a specific set of categories which are relevant for the research objective (Schreier, 2014). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), qualitative content analysis is described as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of (…) data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (pp. 1278).

While requiring similar analytical steps in terms of formulating research questions and designing explicit and exhaustive categories, coding frames and coding rules, qualitative CA differs from quantitative approaches with regard to a more inductive and interpretative outset (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2010). For one thing, by going beyond manifest textual information and including inferred or latent content, the qualitative approach enables the researcher to focus on the semantic relationships and the meaning behind passages rather than merely on the presence of words or phrases (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017).Therefore, it moves away from a "list-and-count approach" (ibid., pp. 3) towards a more contextual, subjective and interpretative analysis of passages. For another thing, qualitative content analysis applies an inductive approach to the design of categories, themes and patterns. Instead of a pre-defined coding scheme, categories are identified and constructed in the course of the analysis, turning coding into a data-driven rather than a mere theory-driven process (Elo et. al., 2014).

Given the explorative research design of the thesis, such an inductive and interpretative approach is crucial for two reasons. On the one hand, although the theoretical framework includes a general idea of the types of ideological concepts populist far-right networks typically encompass (i.e. authoritarianism, nativism, nationalism and populism), the specific themes and patterns remain to be identified. Asking the open question of which ideological messages circulate within the network, the categories thus naturally need to arise from the data. Therefore, instead of establishing a pre-defined coding scheme, the research objective requires a data-driven, iterative coding process in order to achieve the most valid and specific description of the ideology possible.

On the other hand, visiting the above-named definition, tweets do not only contain textual information, but rather varying combinations of text, GIFs, memes and images, including actor-specific slang, symbols and hashtags. As a consequence, their meaning (i.e. ideological message) not necessarily follows from the simple presence of a particular word or phrase, but instead from the interplay of the various pieces of information within the tweet. Moreover, given the limited number of characters, tweets often address societal and political development in an abbreviated way, transporting a latent or implied rather than a manifest message. Finally, tweets with entirely different display formats can still encompass the same underlying ideological message. To provide an example, "Tweet X" includes a 280-character text about Merkel's migration policies and calls for a border closure. "Tweet Y" contains a picture of migrants at the Greek border and the hashtag "keepout", and "Tweet Z" encompasses a GIF of perceived immigrants in Germany including the headline "2015 - never again". Due to the different display formats, wordings and implied messages in this context a rigid quantitative approach, based on manifest textual information and counting words, would hardly be able to code those tweets and assign them to a common category. Within a qualitative, interpretative setting, however, based on contextual information, the underlying message of the tweets can easily be summarised as "nativist" or "anti-immigration". Doing content analysis in the Twitter universe thus needs to go beyond list-and-count-approaches by conducting an overall interpretation of the tweet based on multimedia analysis and contextual information.

While an inductive and interpretative setting of a qualitative CA is thus highly rewarding for the present study, its subjectivity however potentially threatens the validity and reliability (i.e. trustworthiness) of the findings (Elo et. al., 2014). In line with Mayring (2000) and Schreier (2014), the researcher thus faces extra high standards in relation to the design of the categories (code book) as well as the transparency of the coding process. Following their

guidelines, the development of the categories for this research project included several pilot phases, feedback loops and revisions until they met the requirements of unidimensionality, exclusiveness and exhaustiveness (Mayring, 2000; Schreier 2014). Moreover, the coding process was conducted twice in order to the test the quality of the category definitions (i.e. their reliability). In terms of transparency, the entire coding process was documented and saved, whereby the detailed code book including definitions, indicators and coding rules can be found in the appendix to this thesis. Figure 8 provides an overview of the main categories and subcategories designed in order to match both the material as well as the research objective of this project:

Figure 8: Categories

| Main Categories	Grievances	Enemies
Subcategories	No Grievance Migration Left-Wing Extremism Cultural Liberalism Defective Democracy Other	No Enemy Political Establishment Mainstream Media Individual Societal Opponents (Perceived) Foreigners European Union Other

Findings

The qualitative CA is based on 1928 tweets sent by the selected five populist far-right actors between March 1, 2019 and February 28, 2020. In order to be consistent as well to detach the data from specific events and issues the time period of the social network analysis has been adopted. The qualitative content analysis reveals that 60 % of the tweets under study express a grievance, whereby narratives concerning the topics "migration" (26 %) and "defective democracy" (16 %) have been employed most frequently (see Figure 9). Although left-wing extremism" (10 %) and "cultural liberalism" (7 %) have received less attention, the low percentage of the category "other" (1 %) seems to confirm the accuracy of the chosen categories, as they almost fully cover the meanings of the tweets.

Figure 9: Grievances I
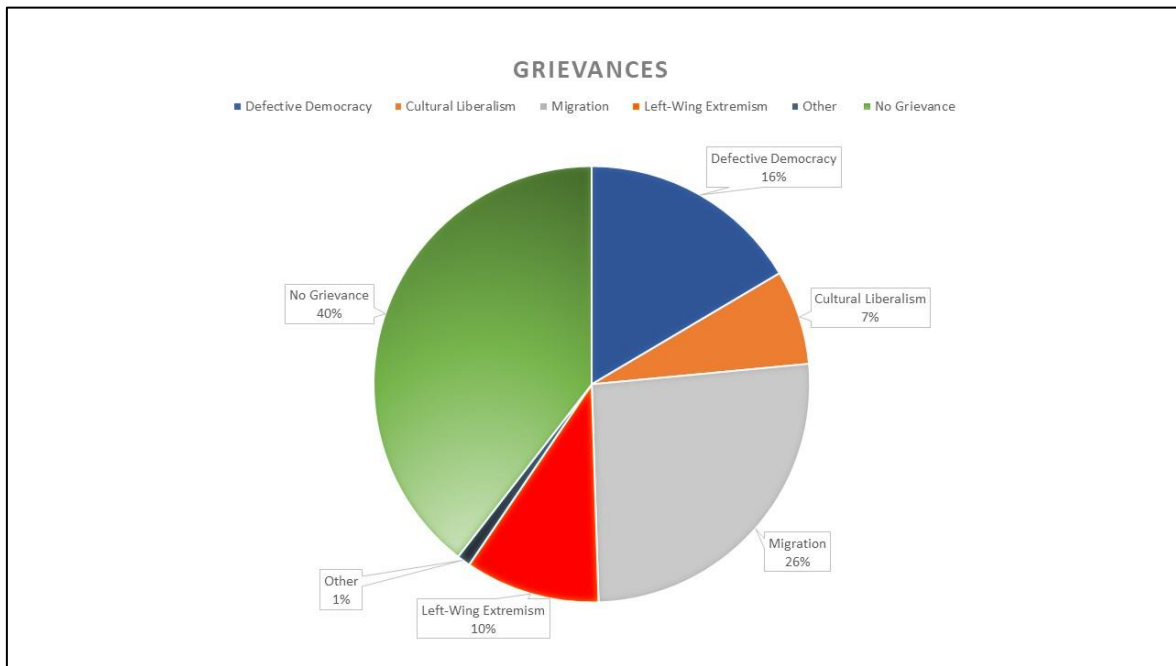
Looking at the actors individually, their thematic focus is not homogenous but rather indicates differing prioritisations (see Figure 10). While almost half of PEGIDA's tweets (47 %) and more than a third of IB's tweets (39 %) problematise migration, they are less concerned with cultural liberalism and left-wing extremism. SiN, on the contrary, most frequently criticises the state of democracy in Germany ("defective democracy", 18 %), closely followed by cultural liberalism (16 %) and left-wing extremism (16 %), whereas largely neglecting migration (7 %). Although Ein Prozent's thematic focus is quite balanced, it concentrates mainly on proclaiming a "defective democracy" (20 %), targeting migration (21%) and left-wing extremism (16,5 %) while paying little attention to cultural liberalism (4 %). Finally, Björn Höcke most frequently frames the state of democracy as an issue, less often expressing sentiments in relation to migration (13 %), left-wing extremism (9 %) and cultural liberalism (7 %).
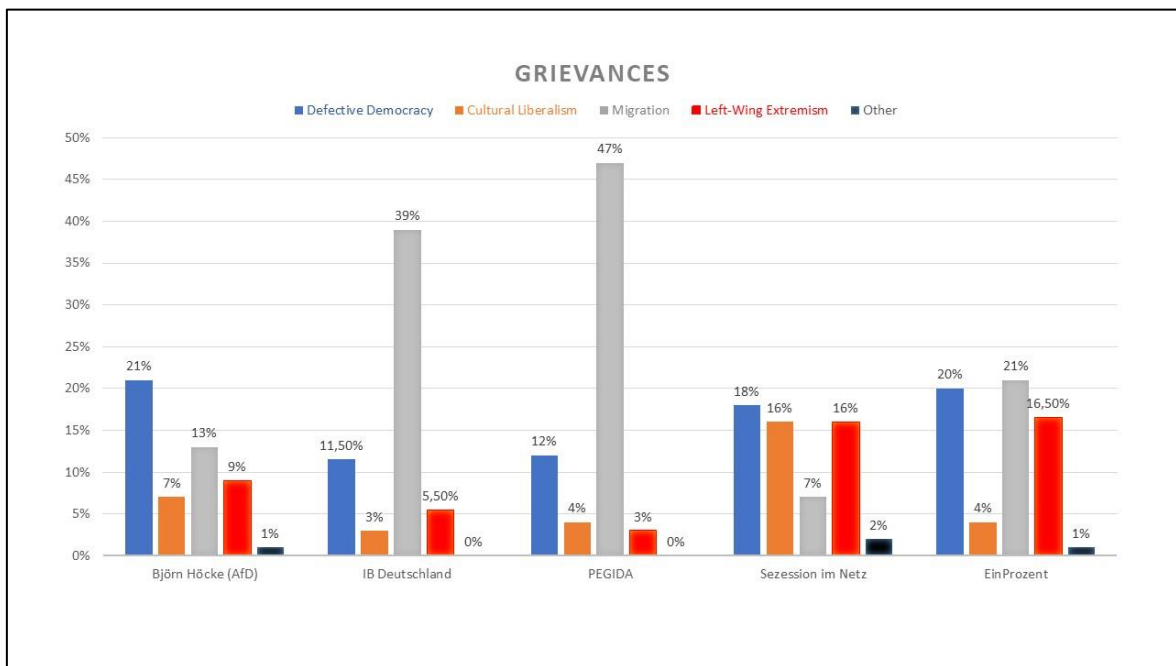
The qualitative content analysis, moreover, reveals that 37 % of the tweets under study define a specific enemy, whereby the populist notion of the "Political Establishment" (26 %) dominates. While "Perceived Foreigners" (17 %) and "Individual Societal Opponents" (15 %) still achieve considerable attention, the "Mainstream Media" (6 %) and the "European Union" (1 %) are only sporadically framed as enemies. Similar to the assessment of grievances, the low percentage of the category "other" (1 %) again underlines the analytical value of the chosen categories (see Figure 11). Looking at the actors individually, the proportional distribution of their enemy image shows a similar degree of heterogeneity and differing prioritisations as their grievances (see Figure 12) However, it stands out that their thematic focus is not necessarily congruent with their preferred enemy image. While almost half of IB's tweets (39 %) problematise migration, only 14 % of them hold perceived foreigners responsible for it. Instead they prominently accuse the political establishment (39 %) and the mainstream media (14 %). This trend runs through the entire sample, although for the other organisations the deviations are not as grave. Furthermore, it stands out that especially Björn Höcke, Ein Prozent, and to a lesser extent SiN, pursue a troubling dichotomy in which they equally blame the political establishment and individual societal organisations. Specifically, in relation to lowering the barriers for violence, this aspect needs to be analysed in the following. Last, as Figure 12 indicates, the surprisingly low criticism

of the European Union stands out. Only the IB occasionally frames the EU as enemy (3,5 %).
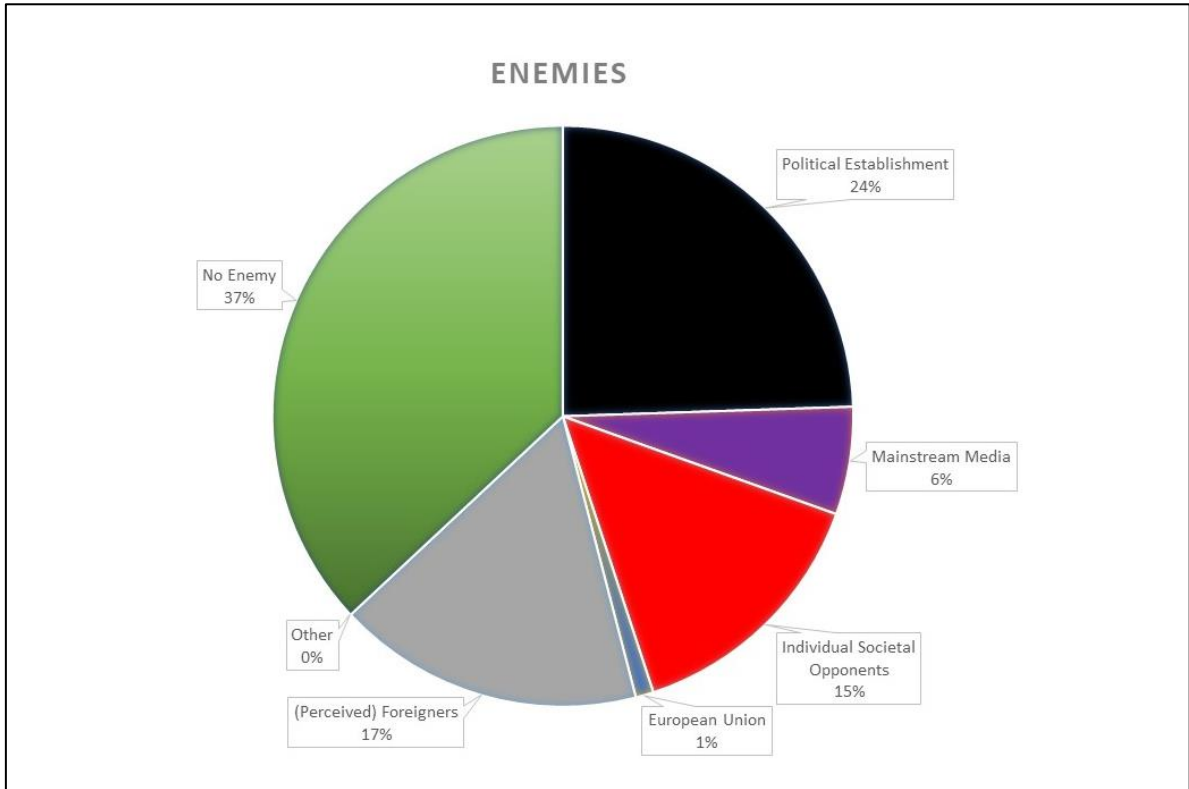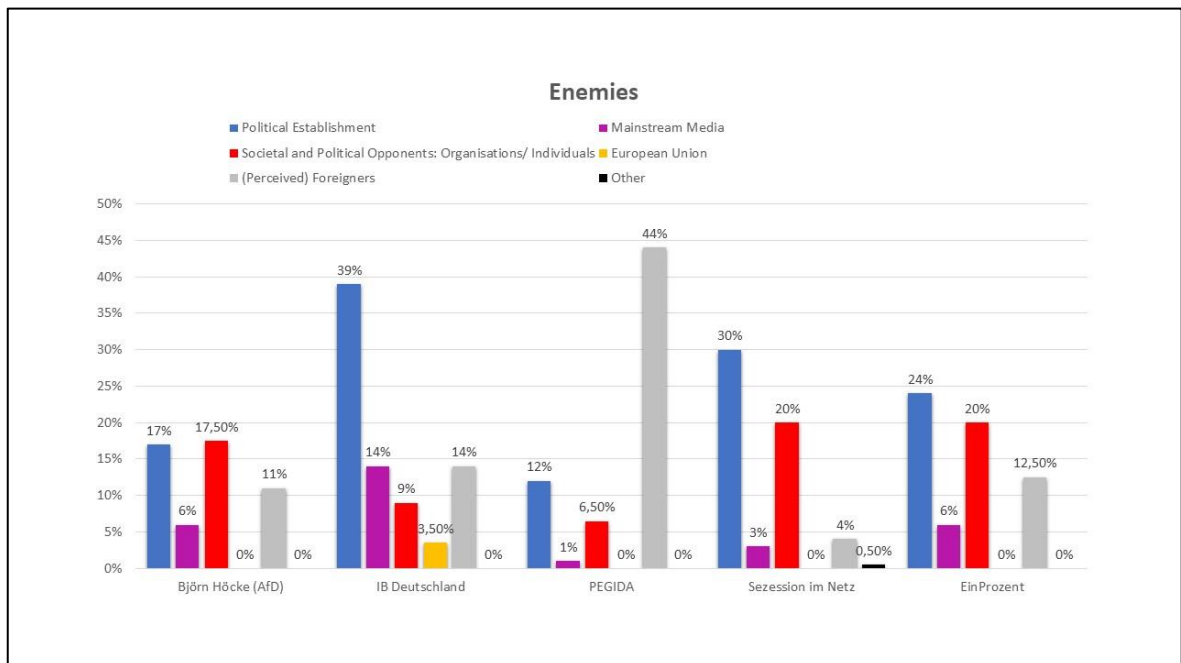
Figure 11: Enemies I

Figure 12: Enemies II

To sum up, the empirical data reveal a densely interconnected populist far-right network on Twitter which heavily engages in the spread of grievances (60 %) and the definition of enemies (67 %). Their collective action frames circle around the opposition to migration, left-wing extremism and cultural liberalism as well as the problematisation of the state of democracy. Corresponding with the definitions of far-rightness and populism mentioned earlier in the thesis, the selected actors thus largely focus on authoritarian (e.g. left-wing extremism), nativist (migration) and populist (e.g. defective democracy, political establishment) ideological messages. At the same time, even though they differ in relation to their prioritisation, their narrow focus on those four topics suggests a form of ideological alignment, i.e. an ideological minimum consensus which is crucial for the formation of a collective identity of the radical social movement.

Taking those findings as a starting point, the following analytical chapters examine the network and its ideology in detail, whereby it highlights specific particularities and uses them to reveal the mainstreaming strategies of the populist far-right.

4 Analysis

4.1 Mainstreaming Strategies of the Populist Far-Right

4.1.1 Activating the Societal Potential

Since its liberation from National Socialism and the end of the Second World War, Germany has gone a long way in dealing with the atrocities committed under fascist rule. Although initially, given the (active or passive) involvement of major parts of the society, the horrors of the Holocaust and other crimes were largely blocked out of the societal debate, ever since the 1970s a broadly conceived culture of remembrance ("Erinnerungskultur") has been established. In order to ensure that the ideologies of national socialism and fascism will never regain strength, Erinnerungskultur has not been limited to the construction of memorials and widespread education, but also included the criminalisation of Nazi-symbols (e.g. Swastika), Nazi-rhetoric (e.g. Heil Hitler, Holocaust Denial) or Nazi-gestures (e.g. Nazi salute) (Wolfram, 2008). While the process of coping with the past has certainly witnessed major backlashes, scandals and controversial public debates, nowadays however, with the Generation Z graduating, studies show that open support for fascism and national socialism has hit a record low. According to the influential Mitte-Studie, published by the FES, in 2018 only 2,4 % percent of the respondents expressed a distinct right-wing extremist worldview,

decreasing from 9,7 % in 2002. The index is measured through the respondent's approval of anti-Semitism, social Darwinism, chauvinism, right-wing totalitarian autocracy and biological racism, i.e. the key characteristics of national socialism and fascism (Zick, Küpper, & Berghan, 2019). Corresponding with the low support for right-wing extremism, according to the Leipziger Autoritarismus-Studie in 2018, 93,3 % of the respondents recognised democracy as the most rewarding political system, while more than 76 % identified with the free democratic order as written in the German constitution (Decker, Kiess, Schuler, Handke, & Brähler, 2018). Returning to the Mitte-Studie, 93 % of the respondent's affirmed that human dignity and equality should be the state's guiding principles and less than 8 % had a hostile stance against the ideal of European unity (Zick, Küpper, & Berghan, 2019). Hence, all in all it seems that the German process of remembrance has been a story of success not only diminishing the support for right-wing extremist ideologies but also deeply entrenching the idea of democracy within the German society.

However, going beyond the support for abstract democratic principles such as human dignity, equality and pluralism, both studies show a much more ambivalent (and troubling) picture suggesting that the situation is far more complex. Asked about specific issues, solutions and measures the democratic façade seems to fade away, revealing widespread authoritarian, nativist and populist tendencies within German society. According to the Leipziger Autoritarismus-Studie, for example, more than 44 % of the respondents support an immigration-ban for Muslims and 55,8 % occasionally feel as a stranger in their own country due to the presence of Muslims. Moreover, 60,4 % approve the stereotype that Sinti and Roma tend to commit crimes, and over 52 % devalue asylum seekers by accusing them of exploiting them German welfare system (Pickel & Yendell, 2018). Following the Mitte-Studie, almost half of the respondents show a group-oriented nativism by opposing equal treatment for all groups and minorities. More specifically, they support a so-called prerogative of the native, which implies certain privileges for "native Germans" (Zick, Küpper, & Berghan, 2019). Looking at authoritarian and populist tendencies, 62 % of the respondents approve the need for law-and-order-authoritarianism, calling for a strong state, which guarantees a strictly ordered society through rigorous law and order policies. Almost 60 % express a deep distrust of the governing elites (ibid.). Those populist sentiments are substantiated by widespread support for conspiracy theories as well as scepticism towards the media and science. While 46 % are convinced that there are secret organisations which

manipulate the government, almost 50 % of the respondents believe that the media and science are biased, i.e. controlled by the government or other forces (ibid.). Thus, on the one hand the main part of German society strongly identifies with (abstract) democratic principles (i.e. the free democratic order) and broadly rejects right-wing extremism as understood in its fascist and national socialist tradition. On the other hand, however, especially in relation to specific issues, solutions and groups (minorities), a large part of society shows authoritarian, nativist and populist tendencies. The aforementioned studies point towards a discrepancy between the democratic societal self-image and the situational reality, which shows considerable support for far-right solutions. More specifically, they suggest a societal demand for a version of far-rightness which is decoupled from its fascist past and superficially compatible with democratic values and the free democratic order (Decker, Kiess, Schuler, Handke, & Brähler, 2018). Revisiting the notion of the democratic mainstream, it thus seems fair to say that although the vast majority of Germans still adheres to the free democratic order, there is a certain vulnerability to far-right beliefs, which threatens the very nature of the democratic consensus in the long-run.

To date, the Old-Right (i.e. neo-Nazis), has not been able or willing to provide such "feel-good far-rightness". Instead, given its glorification of national socialism, openly racist attitudes and the paraded rejection of democratic values, it remained largely on the fringes, forming a subculture rather than attracting the societal mainstream (Koehler, 2018). The strategical groundwork of key leaders of the populist far-right network as identified in the social network analysis, by contrast, reveals a striking awareness of the societal potential as well as the clear intention to activate and extend it. In a confidential strategy paper for the electoral campaign 2017, the AfD, for example, explicitly highlights the central role of professional opinion polling as a guiding element for the choice of content and narratives. The AfD-authors argue that it does not take more than a handful of key topics which are repeated over and over again, to achieve electoral success. They call for the members to study the zeitgeist, identify pressing themes and to convey the messages by using professional marketing tools (AfD-Bundesvorstand, 2017). The protocol of the "IB Summer Academy 2015", moreover states that far-right political communication needs to be understandable, appealing and accessible for the masses. Images and narratives are supposed to touch upon existing concerns within the mainstream society, give them an "identitarian" spin and reveal the "unspoken truth" (Identitäre Bewegung, 2015). As opposed to the ideological core of the movement which needs to be "fierce and eternal", the communication

should hence be "dynamic, modern and flexible" (ibid., pp. 50). Since "a nation does not have eternal enemies but eternal interests" (ibid., pp. 50) [2] , this includes a selection of topics not only based on the organisation's core values but also on their publicity. The organisation's willingness to tailor their ideology to the societal demand as well as their surprisingly accurate understanding of the demand for "feel-good far-rightness" is moreover expressed within a footnote of this protocol. Framed as an advice for self-checking, it advises the activist to imagine being an "ordinary" citizen who wants to share a far-right narrative with his co-workers at a "political-correct" workplace. The narrative or slogan needs to be designed in a way that doesn't provoke immediate opposition (i.e. too provocative) but rather appears socially acceptable and agreeable (ibid.).

While analysing the societal potential and creating custom-tailored content for specific target groups is certainly neither highly innovative nor a strategy that is unique to the populist far-right, the above-named examples underline the movement's clear intention to compete for societal support outside of the subcultural milieu. Furthermore, it suggests a form of political professionalising which has long been absent on the far-right. This professionalising, in return, is further substantiated by their adherence to the concept of the so-called "Overton Window of Political Possibility" which originates from the field of political consulting. According to Martin Sellner, who is the main spokesman of the IB and a key broker within the far-right network (see Figure 7), the concept "visualises and clarifies the battle of ideas and positions like no other" (Sellner, 2019, par. 2). According to him, it indicates precisely which opinions, both left-wing and right-wing, are compatible with the public opinion in relation to a specific topic at a given time and space. Developed by the US-political consultant Joseph P. Overton, the concept is based on the assumption that every political issue has its very own window of discourse. This window marks the range of policies, opinions and statements that are received as legitimated and negotiable positions by societal mainstream. While those opinions are most likely to become established political demands and to be translated into policies in the future, narratives that lie outside of the Overton Window are by contrast deemed provocative, radical or even unthinkable. Holding such opinions can have severe consequences, reaching from decreasing popularity to low electoral support to political suicide (Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 2020). Using martial rhetoric, Sellner even warns his fellow activists of "brutal social isolation, economic

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[2] Quote mistakenly attributed to Winston Churchill by the IB-authors.

embargos, violence and terror" (Sellner, 2019, par. 4) which potentially result from falling outside of the Overton Window.

However, the Overton Window is not stable but rather dynamic and flexible. To quote the website of the (ultra-conservative) Mackinac Center for Public Policy which Mr Overton was associated with until his death in 2003, the Overton Window "can both shift and expand either increasing or shrinking the number of ideas politicians can support without unduly risking their electoral support. Sometimes politicians can move the Overton Window themselves (…), but this is rare. More often, the window moves based on a much more complex and dynamic phenomenon, one that is not easily controlled from on high: the slow evolution of societal values and norms" (Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 2020, par. 2). In an US-American context, examples for a shift of the Overton Window (i.e. the formerly unthinkable becomes acceptable) are manifold, including the discussions about "Medicare for all", Trump's immigration policies and sexist language as well as − historically − the Prohibition (Astor, 2019).

Looking at the increasing far-right popularity in Germany, the initial spark for the infiltration of the topics of migration and cultural identity into the societal discourse traces back to 2011, when Thilo Sarrazin, a German politician and former member of the Executive Board of the Deutsche Bundesbank, published his highly controversial book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Engl.: Germany abolishes itself) (Fuchs & Middelhoff, 2019a). Based on a questionable assemblage of demographic data, crime statistics and education reports, the book prophesises a loss of German identity and culture as well as economic damage due to Muslim immigration. With over 1.5 million copies sold it not only became one of the most successful publications of the decade but also sparked an intense public debate about multiculturalism, immigration and integration (Handelsblatt, 2012). Due to Sarrazin's professional background, his social status as well as the integrity of his publishing company "Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt" (Random House), the book moreover went beyond the sphere of far-right or ultra-conservative readers by reaching the very centre of society. For the first time since Wold War II, the topics of identity loss, cultural homogeneity as well as an alleged downfall of Germany returned to the "mainstream" debate, which caused widespread insecurities not only within the society but also in politics (Fuchs & Middelhoff, 2019a). Half a decade later, the so-called European migration crisis brought the intensity of the public debate to an even higher level.

Although, the concept of the Overton Window was arguably designed as a "description, not a tactic" meant to simply "explain(…) how ideas come in and out of fashion (…) (Astor, 2019, par. 7), the populist far-right seems to have taken the possibility of shifting the window of discourse as an incitement to actively manipulating the public opinion. More specifically, inspired by the "success" of the likes of Trump and Sarrazin, they aim at proactively fabricating, reinforcing and accelerating changes in relation to societal norms and values, and thus extending the window of discourse. Accordingly, the IB strategy paper, for example, states that the populist far-right "wants to go beyond merely repeating the ideas already present within the societal mainstream" towards "enforcing, sharpening and polarising" the public opinion (Identitäre Bewegung, 2015, pp. 30). In this process, the "political communication needs be at the limits of the window of discourse, constantly extending the Overton Window, i.e. the boundaries of the socially acceptable" (ibid.) Visualising the idea, the IB-authors argue that activists need to "take ordinary citizens by the hand, pick them up where they are and lead them up the stairs towards an identitarian worldview" (ibid.). The mainstreaming strategies of the far-right thus follow a two-step logic: On the one hand, far-right politicians and activists attempt to avoid toxic narratives, statements and actions, as they might directly turn them into social outcasts. On the other hand, while largely staying within the current window of discourse, respectively taking up ideas which are already present in the societal mainstream, they try to constantly test the boundaries of the Overton Window in order to extend it and eventually shift it to the right. Based on empirical data gathered through the social network analysis and the qualitative CA, the following chapters discuss three mainstreaming strategies of the populists in detail.

4.1.2 Don't Mention the War

First, the adherence to the logic of the Overton Window becomes evident when looking at the populist far-right's relationship to the Old-Right, respectively the sphere of neo-Nazism. Revisiting the Mitte-Studie and the Leipziger Autoritarismus Studie, the current window of political possibility for far-right ideas is quite narrow. However, the societal mainstream not necessarily rejects far-rightness per se but rather openly expressed Nazism and fascism (see above). Applying the gradual scale, as shown in Figure 13, national socialist opinions and statements are deemed unthinkable within the current societal mainstream, and therefore they are considered to have toxic consequences for the whole movement.

Figure 13: The Far-Right's Understanding of the Overton Window
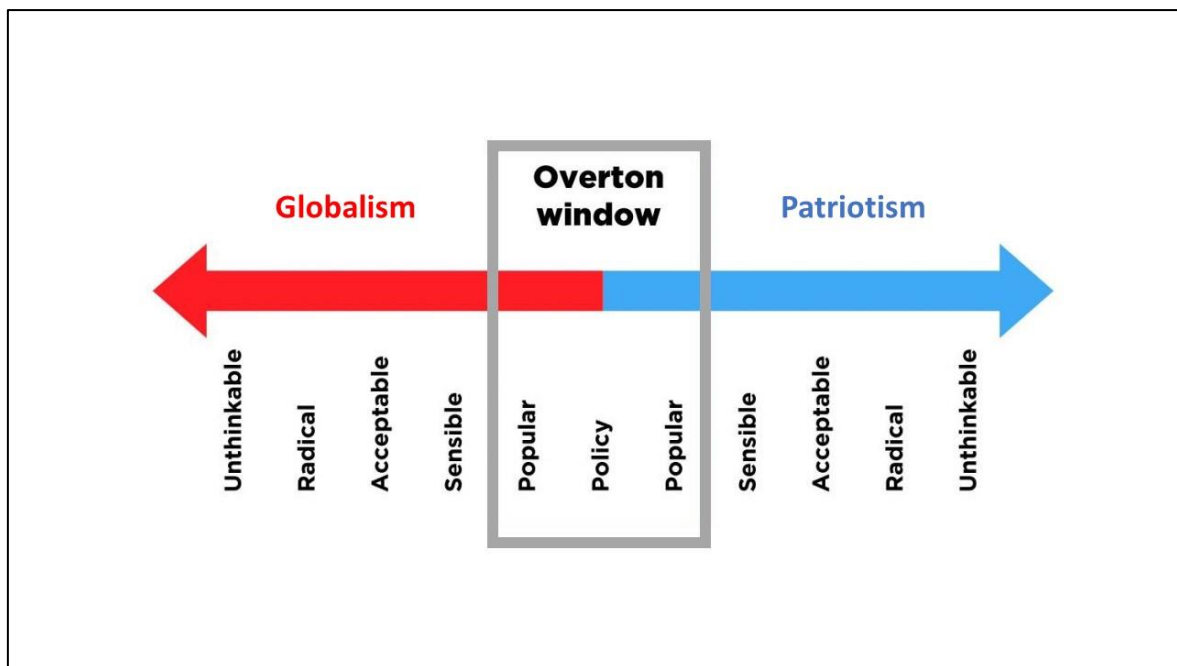
Design: Author's work, based on an illustration in Sellner's article published by the SiN (Sellner, 2019)

Consequently, the populist far-right network aims at creating clear structural boundaries to the sphere of neo-Nazism. As shown in Figure 6, there are no direct communicational links between populist far-right actors and "Junge Nationalisten" (JN) who stand as a proxy for the Old-Right. Moreover, while the indirect links (i.e. through brokers) between the two spheres are already very sporadic, the existing connecting nodes almost exclusively belong to the populist far-right network. In other words, if there are indirect links, it is because the Old-Right occasionally retweets content of the populist far-right, not the other way around. The populist far-right thus relies on its own infrastructure including independent events, campaigns and sources of information (e.g. newspapers, magazines). This even goes beyond missing coordination efforts by revealing a total lack of public support for neo-Nazi events, newspapers and campaigns. Figure 19 (see chapter 6) for example, demonstrates that the populist far-right actors have neither retweeted the "Deutsche Stimme", which is the leading Neo-Nazi newspaper in Germany, nor have they publicly acknowledged the campaigns of "Schutzzonen"[3], "Dresden-Gedenken"[4] or "Gefangenenhilfe"[5].

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[3] „Schutzzonen": Extremist campaign which aims at establishing "safe areas" for Germans (perceived in völkisch terms) in the wake of an alleged rise of "immigrant criminality".

[4] "Dresden-Gedenken": Annual event to remember the alleged "terror bombing" on Dresden by the Royal Air Force in 1945.

[5] "Gefangenenhilfe": Extremist initiative which aims at supporting right-wing extremist prisoners and their families.

This strict dissociation with national socialism and neo-Nazism can also be found within corporate designs, political manifestos and public statements of populist far-right actors. The PEGIDA-logo, for instance, shows a person who throws away several political insignia including the Swastika. Moreover, in the wake of a highly intense public debate concerning the cultic worship of the Wehrmacht within the German armed forces, on its website PEGIDA announced that such behaviour would strongly discredit their "peaceful patriotic movement" (PEGIDA, 2017). The AfD, in return, publicly proclaims the strict obedience to an extensive "Unvereinbarkeitsliste" (Engl.: declaration of incompatibility), which defines several organisations that are deemed incompatible with their political agenda. More specifically, it states that being a member of those organisations makes you ineligible for becoming an AfD-member. Besides religious and leftist groups, the list includes almost the entire neo-Nazi landscape including the NPD and the JN (Alternative für Deutschland, 2020). Finally, in public statements most populist far-right actors take utmost care to not only (superficially) accept Germany's war guilt but also to condemn the atrocities of the holocaust. Dieter Stein, the editor-in-chief of the far-right magazine *Junge Freiheit* which is a prominent source of information within the populist far-right network (see Figure 7), for example, published several interviews with holocaust survivors, referring to the Holocaust as "horrible incident" and "massive tragedy" (Stein D., 2020, par. 6). In addition, on the occasion of the Holocaust Memorial Day in 2020, leading AfD-politicians condemned the "industrial killing of millions of Jews" (*Junge Freiheit*, 2020, par. 1) and publicly propagated their acknowledgement of the free democratic order.

While some scholars suggest that the populist far-right might in fact largely reject National Socialism and fascism, an investigation into the ideological pamphlets of key far-right leaders underlines the strategical nature of the strict dissociation with neo-Nazi-actors. Having realised the toxicity of openly expressed Nazism, anti-Semitism and totalitarianism in relation to the contemporary window of discourse, they not necessarily reject a public alignment with neo-Nazism for ideological reasons but rather in order to avoid damage to their mainstreaming efforts. In an interview with the *New York Times Magazine*, Götz Kubitschek, the leader of the IfS, announced that "the look (of neo-Nazi actors) would impede their efforts to appear as a new kind of postmodern patriotic movement" (Angelos, 2017, par. 18). Moreover, in an essay published by Kubitschek's SiN, Sellner argues that the NS-nostalgia of the NPD has driven a wedge between mainstream society and the sphere of far-right actors. Not only their "aesthetics, language and the pseudo-militant character" but

also their cult-like organisation as well as their constant need for "self-verification" turn their activities into "pure provocation", which does not provide any added value to the "new" populist far-right movement (Sellner, 2019, par. 21- 32). On the contrary, due to the Old-Right's constant and blatant violation of the window of discourse they are not only toxic for the movement but even "allies of the enemy" (ibid., par. 32). Christian Vollradt, one of the chief editors of the *Junge Freiheit*-magazine, employs a similar pattern of argumentation. According to Vollradt, the Old-Right rejects any professionalisation and modernisation and does not seem interested in activating societal potential. Instead their strategies are shaped by "monumental showmanship" which abuse the principle of freedom of speech with "urinal-slogans" (Vollradt, 2019, par. 8). The Old-Right's "spleens" (ibid., par. 9) can thus not be tolerated within the populist far-right movement, as their Nazi-Stigma rather facilitates the narratives of the enemy than those of the populist far-right.

While the populist far-right's authors thus clearly outline the strategical necessity of strict dissociation with neo-Nazism, they however refrain from rejecting the ideological messages of the Old-Right per se. Instead, Kubitschek, for example, even bluntly admits that the differences are rather "semantic than substantial" (Angelos, 2017, par. 18). Together with their deprecative wording, this might suggest that, given the heterogeneity of the populist far-right movement, they try to increase the internal stratification of the movement and to avoid scaring off more extreme currents within their own ranks. Assuming that there is a form of competitive battle for members and recruits on the far-right, specifically their conveyed intellectual and strategical superiority to the sphere of neo-Nazism seems like a plain attempt to position themselves as the only option (i.e. the true path) for far-right success. More specifically, their analysis of the strategical mistakes of the Old-Right could be understood as a reminder for the need for discipline and strict adherence to their mainstreaming strategies addressed at their own members. The downgrading and ridiculing of the Old-Right, in return, seems to be part of a power game within the broader far-right landscape whereby both networks compete for recruits, funding and attention.

4.1.3 Provocation – Trivialisation – Self-Victimisation

Despite their goal to avoid using toxic narratives, populist far-right actors regularly attract public attention through provoking and polarising statements. Given their frequency as well as their routinised execution, those incidents, however, do not necessarily form an unwanted deviation from the mainstreaming efforts of the populist far right. On the contrary, they rather form a key part of their mainstreaming efforts. In other words, instead of being random

provocations, those statements present an intentional, calculated taboo-breaking followed up by a constantly recurring pattern of trivialisation and self-victimisation, i.e. a commemorated victimhood culture. This process has recently been visualised by the Amadeu-Antonio-Stiftung in its latest publication *Alternative Wirklichkeiten* (Engl.: Alternative Realities), using a quote of Alexander Gauland, co-chairman of the AfD, as an exemplary (Dittrich, Jäger, Meyer, & Rafael, 2020), (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Provocation – Trivialisation – Self-Victimisation
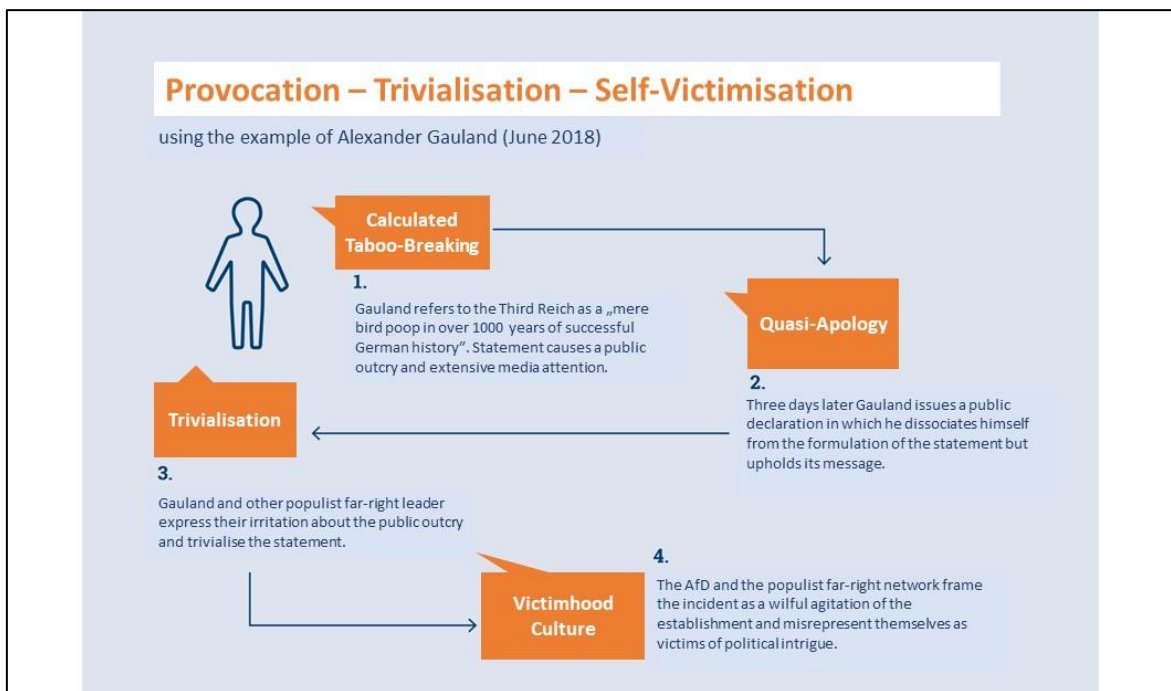
Design: Author's work, based on Dittrich, Jäger, Meyer, & Rafael, 2020

In a speech held at a party congress of the AfD youth organisation "Junge Alternative" in June 2018, Gauland argued that Hitler and the Third Reich "present just a speck of bird's muck in over 1000 years of successful German history" (*BBC*, 2020, par. 5). The statement sparked an intense public debate in which Gauland and the AfD were strongly criticised due to the apologetic nature of the narrative as well as its disrespect for the victims of the Third Reich. Claiming that Gauland's statement had been misunderstood by the public, the AfD soon attempted to resort to a form of self-victimisation, whereby they blamed the public and specifically the media of agitating against them (Dittrich, Jäger, Meyer, & Rafael, 2020). A similar pattern was observable when Björn Höcke, chairman of the AfD in Thuringia, called the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin a "monument of shame", or when Frauke Petry, former

chairwoman of the AfD called for the use of firearms in order to prevent undocumented immigrants from crossing into Germany (Zeit Online, 2016; The Guardian, 2017).

Shedding light on the different elements of the strategy it is necessary, as a first step, to distinguish between thematic taboo-breaking and personal provocation. Thematic taboo-breaking for one thing refers to publicly expressing controversial and polarising opinions, proposals or formulations. In this context, the strategy paper of the AfD, for example, encourages their members to "consciously, purposefully and repeatedly be politically incorrect, to use clear language and not to hesitate to employ carefully calculated provocations" (AfD-Bundesvorstand, 2017, pp. 10). This, on the one hand, includes straight-forward messages such as the statements of Gauland, Höcke and Petry, whose controversial core is clearly visible and coherent (see above). On the other hand, it encompasses more subtle narratives which are sometimes referred to as so-called dog-whistles (e.g. Albertson, 2015; Searles, 2016). Having gained considerable attention in the context of Anglo-American politics and specifically recently during the Trump-presidency, the idea of dog-whistle politics describes the use of messages "that sound innocuous to the general population but (are) intended to be interpreted favourably by a specific group of people" (*The Washington Post*, 2018, par. 2). Especially in relation to radical or extremist narratives, employing dog-whistles hence enables politicians and activists to convey a highly controversial meaning to specific target groups without appearing too "toxic" for the current window of discourse (Albertson, 2015). Moreover, given the criminalisation and "tabooing" of a broad range of right-wing extremist language and content in Germany, this form of doublespeak provides a valuable tool to design statements that are not only easily trivializable but also seldomly lead to legal consequences. According to Dittrich et. al. (2020), the use of dog-whistles therefore presents a popular strategy to conduct calculated taboo-breaking within mainstream society, but without being held accountable for it, respectively without appearing too extreme. Similar to other far-right politicians such as Trump or the Hungarian President Viktor Orban, the populist far-right frequently employs such concealed messages. During a meet-up of the ultra-right-wing section of the AfD in Schnellroda which was co-hosted by Götz Kubitschek, Björn Höcke, for example, argued that party members who deviate from the party line should at one point be "AUsgeSCHWITZt" (Zeit Online, 2020a). While the term can literally be translated to "sweated out", its context as well as its articulation however strongly suggest a referral to Auschwitz concentration camp, in which more than 1.1 million people were killed by the

Nazis. After facing public and intra-party criticism Höcke trivialised his statement by calling it an unlucky formulation (ibid.). On other occasions, Höcke furthermore demanded a "180-degree turn", i.e. a departure from the culture of remembrance. He repeatedly and subtly paraphrased Joseph Goebbels, one of Hitler's closest associates and Reichsminister of Propaganda, which apart from public criticism had no legal or personal consequences (Funke, 2016). Besides Höcke's Nazi-dog whistles there is a broad range of anti-immigrant dog-whistles circulating within the populist far-right movement. Often combined with so-called derogatory and disparaging humour, far-right activists and media would counter the perceived political correctness of the "establishment" by "ironically" adopting and modifying its terminology (Greene, 2019). In the past, they, for example, labelled migrants as "Kulturbereicherer" (Engl.: cultural enricher) and "Fachkräfte" (Engl.: skilled employees) or used the hashtag "Einzelfall" (Engl.: isolated incident) to describe incidents of alleged immigrant criminality. Although neither literally nor historically associated with the far-right, in a certain time and context those terms are often loaded with a nativist message and turned into far-right dog-whistles.

Figure 15: Far-Right Dog-Whistles

Source: twitter.com

For another thing, the populist far-right network engages in personal provocation. A so-called "Handbook for Online-Guerrillas" published by the website "D-Generation", which

is closely associated with the IB, for example, extensively explains the concept of trolling to far-right activists (D-Generation, unknown). The authors encourage far-right activists to "burn their enemies up" and to "provoke them into a course of action they'll regret afterwards" (ibid. pp. 3). Moreover, they describe a range of strategies to expose and humiliate individuals and organisations, including dox(x)ing and so-called "memetic warfare", whereby personal information on "enemies" is published or used in defamatory memes and videos (ibid.). Often such personal provocation assumes the shape of full-scale campaigns (so-called "raids"), which are organised and coordinated on less monitored platforms and imageboards including 4chan, Telegram or Gab, and later executed on large social media outlets such as Facebook or Twitter. The phenomenon goes well beyond the populist far-right social movement as analysed in this thesis, since it not only reveals a strong connection to certain subcultures such as gamers and hackers but also shows a transnational character (see Bogert & Fielitz, 2019, for details). Nonetheless, the empirical data provides significant evidence for the engagement of the populist far-right network in acts of personal provocation. Between March 31, 2019 and February 28, 2020, one out of seven tweets encompassed a narrative directed against a specific societal opponent (i.e. individuals and groups), which included prominent victims such as Walter Lübcke[6], Matthias Quent[7], Hajo Funke[8], Katharina König-Preuss[9] or members of the Fridays for Future Movement (see Figure 11).

First and foremost, those types of provocations are intended to maximise public attention and to create a form of societal relevance which enables the far-right to perform their mainstreaming strategies (Wodak, 2015). Employing a metaphor used by Dittrich et. al., the populist far-right understands the radical contrast society, i.e. the sphere of interaction with the mainstream society, as a stage, whereby a calculated interplay between controversial statements and the response of the media and societal opponents serves as a reliant strategy to boost their audience and increase their playing time. In this context, the populist far-right attempts to exploit the dynamics of modern social media algorithms and (TV)-media

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[6] Prominent CDU-politician with a clear pro-refugee stance. Assassinated by the far-right terrorist Stephan Ernst in July 2019.
[7] Specialist on the German far-right. Founder of the "Institute for Democracy and Civil Society" in Jena, Germany.
[8] Political Scientist specialising on right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism. Professor emeritus at Freie Universität Berlin.
[9] Member of the state parliament of Thuringia for the left-wing party "Die Linke".

sensationalism. Given their polarising and emotionalising impact on debates, provocations tend to nurture feelings of anger and disgust, which not only mobilise supporters but also provoke societal and political opponents into a course of action. The increasing interaction with far-right content (clicks, comments, public statements) in return amplifies the likelihood of both the topic and the actors behind it being picked up and multiplicated by social media platforms and traditional media (Dittrich, Jäger, Meyer, & Rafael, 2020). While the strategy papers of the AfD, as well as the IB, clearly acknowledge the need for higher media presence, the AfD even outlines the benefits of negative comments made by opponents. According to them, "nobody gives more significance to the AfD than the political opponent" and "the more they try to stigmatise the AfD because of its provoking language and actions, the more they sharpen its profile" (AfD-Bundesvorstand, 2017, pp. 11). Controversial statements thus ensure that the media cannot ignore the AfD (ibid.).

Secondly, and following Sellner's strategical deliberations regarding the Overton Window, provocations serve as a reliable tool to both bring up topics for discussion (agenda-setting) and to control how they are discussed (second-level agenda-setting).Based on the idea of a "radical flank effect" he claims that a position can be mainstreamed by "consciously popularizing a more radical one. Relative to the radical provocation, the actual demand then appears more moderate". (Sellner, 2019, par. 16). Since the public discourse is unstable and dynamic, by constantly creating new radical flanks "yesterday's radical positions are trivialised and become the new centre" (ibid.). Building on this logic, provocations serve as a spearhead which familiarises the societal mainstream with radical and extreme far-right ideas by simply creating new shocks. In its wake, more moderate forces within the populist far-right network can then exploit the public attention by further elaborating on the topics brought up through provocation. The calculated provocation hence operates based on strong networked thinking, i.e. a self-identification as a network which corresponds with the movement dynamics revealed within the SNA.

According to the AfD strategy paper, members should refrain from engaging in substantial discussions with experts, since "it is not about developing nuanced and sophisticated solutions in relation to central topics". As only the established parties can "shine" within expert discussions, members of the AfD should instead constantly repeat short and clear statements, whereby "catchiness trumps thoroughness". In line with the findings of the renowned German political scientist Samuel Salzborn, the populist far-right thus aims at

spreading "as many (provoking) lies and factoids as possible" to create a "dense fog of rumours" in which there is no truth but only "post-factual emotions" (Salzborn, 2017, pp. 16). While the media and the political opponents are still occupied with criticising and fact-checking each statement, the "radical flank" already moves on and breaks further taboos. As a result, a broad range of narratives within the public discourse remains prominent but unopposed, which supports the populist far-right in creating their illusion of truth.

This way, they not only benefit from the fact that a topic is brought up for debate, but also from the way it is talked about. In other words, the type of provocation often predefines the angle from which a topic is discussed. In 2018, for example, following an intense public debate about allegedly high immigrant criminality, which was strongly fostered by far-right provocation and dog-whistles (e.g. Einzelfall; see above), the prominent political talkshow *Hart Aber Fair* (up to 3,5 million viewers per week) picked up on the topic (Cicero, 2018). Although the talk show itself included a very diverse circle of guests who seemed to be quite endeavoured to contextualise the issue and to put it into perspective, its title adopted the far-right narrative: "Young men, fleeing war and archaic societies: Are those refugees even assimilable? How do they increase instability in Germany?" This title presented immigrant criminality as a fact and also implied an impact on Germany's national security (asking "how", not "if"). For another thing, by doubting the integrability of refugees, it framed disintegration as a legitimate option, which can be discussed within a democratic society. While talk shows and other media certainly need to create catchy headlines to attract viewers, herewith *Hart Aber Fair* presented an excellent exemplar for far-right (second level) agenda-setting and its manipulation of the mainstream media.

Thirdly, the populist far-right uses their public attention and medial stage to work on their commemorated victimhood culture. As shown in Figure 9, 16 % of their tweets criticise the current state of democracy in Germany ("defective democracy") and 10 % complain about the alleged danger posed by left-wing extremism. Their grievances centre around narratives about an alleged crisis of free speech, a demonisation of right-wing ideologies and a perceived left-wing authoritarian government led by Angela Merkel. This "Merkel-Diktatur" (Engl.: Merkel dictatorship) is safeguarded through rigid censorship and enforced by ideologically instrumentalised intelligence services (e.g. BfV). Looking at the blog on the EinProzent website, the authors, for example, frequently frame the BfV as a political tool of the "establishment", which "conducts an attack against the legitimate democratic opposition

and its environment" (EinProzent, 2020, par. 1). In addition, due to AfD-politician Markus Krah who is also featured within the populist far-right network on Twitter, the BfV is at risk of becoming a "Stasi 2.0" (ibid., par. 4).[10] Following Benedikt Kaiser who works as an author for the SiN and is the key broker within the network (most retweets, see Figure 7), the BfV forms the "sword and shield" (Kaiser, 2020, par. 3) of the ruling class, protecting them against the competition posed by a strong democratic opposition. According to Kaiser, the BfV aims at denouncing "*all* right wing-positions" (ibid., par. 14) although they are protected by free speech.

What the populist far-right views as state-controlled "censorship" is not limited to the BfV but also conducted by "fake-news" media as well as social media platforms. In the wake of the BfV's increased interest in the populist far-right network, large players such as Facebook and Instagram, for example, successfully banned key actors including the IB, EinProzent and Martin Sellner. Through this so-called de-platforming, they exercised their virtual domestic authority and enforced some policies against hate speech (Zeit Online, 2020b). After having filed (unsuccessful) lawsuits against those measures, the populist far right, however, instrumentalised the situation to further substantiate their claim of the establishment being afraid of the competition. Moreover, they view it as proof for the ideologically motivated incapacitation of citizens who are not allowed to think on their own (Dittrich, Jäger, Meyer, & Rafael, 2020). Specifically, to the mainstream media, the populist far right, often confuses the differences between freedom of speech and freedom of contradiction. In other words, although most provocations are protected by free speech, they are not protected from public opposition by the government, societal opponents, media outlets or measures of private companies. Hence, while provocateurs cannot be legally prosecuted for their words, they still need to deal with the opposition. Unfortunately, this alleged demonisation of far-rightness and incapacitation of the citizen enfolds some appeal to conservatives who themselves feel restricted by progressive changes such as "politically correct" language. As a consequence, some influential media outlets seem to have fallen for the far-right's strategy of self-victimisation. The *Tagesschau*, Germany's largest and most viewed television news programme in 2016, for example, ceased calling the AFD "right-wing populist" to avoid a "patronisation" (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 2016, par. 2) of the viewer.

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[10] The term "Stasi" refers to Ministry of State Security of the former German Democratic Republic, which has been known as a brutal and repressive intelligence and secret police agency.

Furthermore, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, a renowned newspaper from Switzerland, acknowledged the idea of demonisation of the term "right-wing" within a leading article (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* 2020). Due to the author, the "leftist mainstream" tends to unjustly equate legitimate right-wing conservative ideas with right-wing extremism and has often been too quick to "play the Nazi card" (ibid.). Both media outlets thus adopt the network's notion of the term far-right being a discrediting label which is used by the establishment out of ideological calculus. Revisiting the definitional complexity of the term far-rightness, outlined earlier in the thesis, this is not necessarily surprising, as not even academia can establish a form of conceptual clarity. Nonetheless, to portray far-rightness as a subjective label rather than an academically assessable term which is based on predefined characteristics presents a great concession to the post-factual world of the populist far-right and is thus highly troubling.

Moreover, in line with their criticism of left-wing extremism, the populist far-right claims that "dissidents" of this totalitarian "Merkel-dictatorship" are not only societally stigmatised by the left-wing establishment but even violently persecuted on the streets by their paramilitary branch, the Antifa. Therefore, the populist far-right not only prominently frames the political establishment as the main enemy (24 %) but also individual societal opponents, which includes antifascist left-wing groups and individuals (15 %). In this context, the influential populist far-right magazine *Compact Online*, for example, refers to the Antifa as the "bandogs, the SA of the globalist establishment" (*Compact Online*, 2019, par. 1).[11] According to *Compact Online,* "there is no other group in this country that creates more intimidation and terror than the so-called Antifa" (ibid.). EinProzent, furthermore, claims that "days without news about leftist orgies of violence are rare" and that the "brutal and misanthropic thugs stop at nothing" (EinProzent, 2018, par. 1). They propagate the idea of a hidden left-wing power structure which is based on the perfected "interplay of peaceful protest of the (…) civil society, state repression against patriots, and the Antifa-thugs" (ibid., par. 2). This framing of the Antifa as a state-controlled terror organisation is substantiated by sophisticated media campaigns, hashtags and video material. Following the pattern of taking up topics already present within the mainstream, the populist far-right aims at

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[11] The SA (Sturmabteilung) was the paramilitary wing of Hitler's NSDAP. Between the 1920 and 1930s it played a key role in protecting Nazi rallies and assemblies. Moreover, it disrupted meetings of oppositional forces, intimated their supporters and engaged in heavy street fights against other paramilitary groups.

intensifying public debates about severe forms of left-wing extremist violence (e.g. G20 Hamburg summit, Leipzig- Connewitz) by linking them to alleged attacks against members of the populist far-right movement. Altogether, the populist far-right tries to create a picture of a violent enemy from within which poses a far bigger threat to democracy than they do themselves (Quent, 2019b). While increasing left-wing extremism and violence certainly presents a troubling development, there is however a vast agreement amongst national security agencies that there is no such thing as an organised and homogenous terror organisation called Antifa (LaFree, 2018). Nonetheless, the portrayed image has gained momentum amongst conservatives and other populist politicians especially in the wake of US-President Trump's campaign against the Antifa. Accusing them of inciting violence in the course of the "Black Lives Matter"-protests he addressed plans to classify them as a terrorist group (*Foreign Policy*, 2020). In addition, most recently he adopted the age-old tale of a communist threat by announcing that his government is in a process of "defeating the radical left, the Marxists, the anarchists, the agitators, the looters" and that they "will never allow an angry mob to tear down our statues, erase our history, indoctrinate our children or trample on our freedoms" (*CNN*, 2020, par. 5-7).

Finally, the notion of (white) victimhood is substantiated by appealing to society's openness for populist tales about the corrupt, remote-controlled government and biased media and science (see Chapter 4.1.1) This includes nativist conspiracy theories such as the "Islamisation of the Occident" and the "Great Replacement". Those theories conjure the image of a doom of the white European population as well as Christian culture. PEGIDA and the IB, for example, claim that through mass migration and demographic growth the European, Christian population is progressively replaced by non-European people mainly from the Middle East and North Africa (Bjorgo & Ravndal, 2019). This replacement is led and executed by "globalist elites", which aim at weakening the "Volk" (engl.: ethnic people) to create easily controllable and exchangeable "human capital" that serves their needs (ibid.). Although the populist far-right's opposition to cultural and ethnic mixing brings them very close to "toxic" biological racism, they deny such claims by referring to the idea of ethnopluralism. The concept says that all ethnic groups and "races" have a right to exist, but in order to preserve ethno-cultural diversity they should not leave their ancestral territory (Dittrich, Jäger, Meyer, & Rafael, 2020). Under the guise of protecting cultural pluralism, immigrants who leave their homelands are framed as invaders and "Kulturzerstörer" (engl.: cultural destroyers). This in return justifies the populist far-right's nativist narrative of a need

to "defend Europe", which is often accompanied by martial symbolism. The logo of the IB, for example, shows the Greek letter Lambda that reminds of the military insignia of the elite warriors of ancient Sparta. As popularised by the movie "300", Spartans led the Greek city-states in the "Battle of Thermopylae", defending Greek territories against a Persian invasion. Moreover, the populist far-right's slogan "Reconquista" refers to a period of history in medieval Spain, in which Christian armies recaptured territory from Muslim rulers on the Iberian Peninsula (Fuchs & Middelhoff, 2019a). Finally, the IB's yearly celebrations concerning the "Battle of Vienna 1683" stand as another example for far-right symbolism drawing the picture of threatened Christian people entering into an existential clash of arms with "Muslim invaders" (Endstation Rechts, 2019).

The victimhood culture serves two main objectives: First, given its heterogeneity, the far-right network is supposed to foster the formation of a collective identity and strengthen intra-group solidarity. More specifically, by establishing a clear friend-enemy distinction it is supposed to compensate for potential ideological differences. Accordingly, Sellner, for example, states: "(…) Antifascists have thrown stones at us. All of us have lost bank accounts and platform, have been outed and threatened by the authorities with social exclusion and societal death". Therefore "everybody who is 'right-wing' enough to be brutally attacked by Antifa, mainstream media or the legal authorities is also enough 'right-wing' for me" (Sellner, 2019b, par. 29). In addition, in line with Kaiser, he argues that their belief in the idea of the "Great Replacement" presents the "political minimum" and the "ideological bottle neck" (ibid., par. 12; Kaiser, 2017) of the far-right network. Although there might be libertarian, Christian or anti-imperialist perspectives on the reasons for the replacement, "every actor has an honest and burning concern about the future of his home and his children" (Sellner, 2019, par. 14). While this creates a form of "basic solidarity" which is needed to survive the "legal, financial and physical attacks", it also constructs a "feeling of being part of something bigger" (Stein P. , 2018, pp. 4). Furthermore, it provides them with a rationale for the alleged oppression as it draws the picture of a brave ingroup which is persecuted by a powerful outgroup only because it has discovered the truth. Second, by portraying themselves as the victims and denying the role of the attacker, the populist far-right aims at evoking feelings of sympathy and compassion. Conducting a form of victim blaming, they accuse the "establishment" of brutally oppressing dissent and limiting the freedom of speech. This in return is supposed to delegitimise the current political system and

to frame its representatives as fascist and totalitarian forces which rely on Nazi methods (see Chapter 5 for details).

5   Implications for the Emergence of Hive Terrorism

Returning to Koehler's theoretical model regarding the emergence of hive terrorism, the previous chapters clearly outline the populist far-right radical social movement's attempts to create infrastructural and ideological crosscuttings with mainstream society. By professionalising their communication and marketing skills (e.g. in relation to social media usage, activism, apparel, music and rhetoric) they have established targeted strategies to activate the societal potential. Moreover, following the theory of the Overton Window, they plan to move the window of discourse to the right through a sophisticated manipulation of the public opinion. This manipulation, on the one hand, includes a rigid (public) dissociation with the Old Right, i.e. the sphere of neo-Nazism, in order to avoid their "toxicity" and remain socially acceptable. On the other hand, it encompasses a constant testing of the boundaries of the window of discourse through an elaborated strategy of provocation, trivialisation and self-victimisation. Together they are supposed to maximise the populist far-right's audience, extend their playing time and familiarise the mainstream public with far-right ideas and proposals.

Although the populist far-right does not openly pursue a fascist or national socialist ideology, they still lower the thresholds for contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist beliefs as they use the crosscuttings with mainstream society to convey ideological messages which in the final analysis are right-wing extremist, i.e. not compatible with the free democratic order. This extremist nature not solely evolves from specific narratives or actions but rather from aggregation and contextualisation of mainstreaming strategies. The populist far-right's combination of major tactics of moving the window of discourse (1. achieving a prerogative of interpretation and 2. establishing a patriotic counterculture (see Appendix 6.1) strategically assembles within the concept of metapolitics, which ironically derives from the well-known Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (Pfahl-Traughber, 2019). In the wake of the emergence of modern mass societies in the early 20th century, Gramsci argued that conducting a successful revolution requires challenging the cultural hegemony of the ruling class. In other words, revolutionary forces need to win the heads and minds of the people, by carefully introducing them to their revolutionary ideas and beliefs. After having

successfully conquered and changed those peoples' worldview, the resulting consent then forms a promising basis for a revolution (ibid.). While desiring a fundamentally different kind of revolution than Gramsci, the populist far-right follows this spirit by seeing themselves in a battle of cultures which is fought within the radical contrast society. In line with Gramsci's perception this battle in the metapolitical space is fought by intellectuals, respectively elites, which aim at winning over the "common people" who eventually execute the revolution with their "bare knuckles". (Weißmann as quoted in Kubitschek, 2019, par. 25)

As opposed to Gramsci's Marxist revolution the intellectual scene of the German populist far-right employs the concept of meta-politics to incite a "conservative revolution" (Weiß, 2015). Due to its socially acceptable sound, the (paradox) term has already found its way into the mainstream. In 2018, Alexander Dobrindt, a high ranked politician of the governing party CSU, for example, declared: "Right now we are experiencing a conservative revolution of the citizens, emerging from the midst of society, and encompassing a return to tradition and values. The drivers of this development are globalisation and digitalisation since in a constantly changing world the people desire stability – their home, security and freedom" (Dobrindt, 2018, par. 8). While Dobrindt uses the term as a rhetorical device to describe a romanticised conservative utopia, which is precisely the image the populist far-right aims at conveying, the desired conservative revolution is not peaceful but rather deeply right-wing extremist. Even more, the concept provides the key to reveal the underlying logic behind the mix of authoritarian, nativist and populist ideological messages circulating within the far-right network and to explain why the network can be right-wing extremist without being Nazi.

The populist far-right's understanding of the concept traces back to the 1950s when the scholars of the "New Right" (Fr.: Novelle Droit) first attempted to recover extreme right patterns of argumentation, objectives and terminology and to detach them from the stigma of Nazism (Weiß, 2015). By basically ignoring the period of National Socialism, scholars such as Armin Mohler, Alan de Benoist and Guillaume Faye tried to build a bridge to the period of the Weimar Republic, namely to the intellectual scene of the so-called "Conservative Revolution". They draw a picture of a group of German intellectuals searching for a "third way" between traditional conservatism and Nazism in the 1920s (ibid.). Inspired by the anti-modern and anti-rationalist epoch of German Romanticism as

well as the widespread cultural pessimism of the early 20th century, scholars such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Oswald Sprengler, Edgar Julius Jung, and Carl Schmitt identified "the decline of the west". This decline was allegedly caused by parliamentarism, liberalism and egalitarianism as well the rising individualism, materialism and rationalism of modern mass societies (Meyer, 2018).

Revisiting the populist far-right's grievances of cultural liberalism, migration, left-wing extremism, and defective democracy, which are communicated with almost every second tweet (see Figure 9) on Twitter, they attempt to transfer this spirit of cultural despair, apocalypse and moral deterioration to today's postmodern society. Based on their (law-and-order)-authoritarian narratives concerning immigrant criminality, gender madness, premature sexualisation, climate change hysteria or the crisis of masculinity, they demonise liberalism, globalism and multi-culturalism and frame them as the root causes for societal deterioration as well as rising powerlessness of the ethnic minority population (Quent, 2019b). They catastrophise the present and idealise the past, for example when Björn Höcke states: "Only if we *rediscover* our masculinity, we will be valiant!" (ibid., pp. 78). While such reactionism is certainly not alien to the contemporary zeitgeist, as prominently shown in form of Trump's slogan: "Make America great *again*!" or the Brexit slogan: "Take *back* control!", the far-right's espousing of cultural pessimism takes it to a new level. According to the scholars of the "Conservative Revolution", overcoming the "decadence" of German high culture, identity and the "Volk" (engl.: ethnic people) in the modern era, requires an active restoration of traditional values and a strictly ordered society (Pfahl-Traughber, 1998). More specifically, they propagate the need for an ethnically and culturally homogenous "Volksgemeinschaft" (Engl.: ethnic community), whereby the collective prosperity of the ordered and cultivated Volksgemeinschaft stands above the human rights of the individual (ibid.). Such ethno-cultural homogeneity, order and collectivism, in return, are prime features of the "patriotic counterculture" which the populist far-right aims at mainstreaming. Fighting the alleged deterioration of morality caused by the weakness of liberal societies, they aim at turning back time to an imaginary golden age which was dominated by strong leadership instead of liberal compromises, traditional (family) values instead of diversity, and patriotic nationalism instead of multicultural globalism. Revisiting Koehler's notion of the target society, the populist far-right herewith tries to appeal to (patriarchal) conservatives and traditionalists who feel overwhelmed by changing gender roles, new family models, gender-sensitive language, diversity, and multicultural societies.

Although the populist far-right narrative has been quite successful (as shown in the analysis above and most explicitly by Alexander Dobrindt's adoption of the term "conservative revolution"), their utopia of a new society after a successful revolution is not compatible with today's understanding of liberal democracy and free democratic order. In their quintessence, their proposals require a fundamental departure from the progressive changes the German society has made in the last decades. Strictly enforcing their idea of ethnopluralism, for example, would mean to deport citizens who do not meet certain ethnic standards, which in return strongly reminds of Nazism. Moreover, establishing a prerogative of the native or reverting the progress in relation to gender equality and LGBTQ-rights, clearly violates Art. 3 of the constitution (principle of equality). Finally, fabricating a form of cultural homogeneity based on Judeo-Christian values to the detriment of Islam is neither compatible with Art. 1 and Art. 4 of the constitution nor with the self-conception of a modern, secular and liberal democracy. However, those extremes certainly need to be distinguished from legitimate conservative positions which stand firmly within the democratic consensus. Not every conservative who has a critical standpoint regarding one of those topics is necessarily right-wing radical or extreme. Nonetheless, the democratic mainstream moves along with progressive changes. Therefore, clinging to a position, which might have been deemed democratic decades (e.g. criminalisation of homosexuality, patriarchism), means you are radical right from today's perspective. As a result, it seems fair to say that conservatives are still the primary and most promising target group for the mainstreaming strategies of the populist far-right. To sum up, the populist far-right lowers the thresholds for contact between "ordinary" citizens and an anti-egalitarian, anti-pluralist and anti-liberal ideology, which is clearly right-wing extremist and not compatible with the free democratic order.

After all, although the populist far-right seldomly motivates for violent action directly, they deliberately put an extremist ideology out there which effectively lowers the barrier for the use of severe forms of violence. Linked to their vision of a conservative revolution, they employ a dystopian meta-narrative which fosters the idea of an existential threat to German society (see also Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2017). They identify the deterioration of the population caused by demographic changes and migration. Due to the weakness of the liberal society which results in moral deterioration and a loss of tradition and values, people are not ready to defend themselves against the invasions of foreigners. Moreover, the political

establishment not only refrains from taking action against this "Islamisation of the occident" but rather accelerates it through their strategy of the "Great Replacement". As a consequence, Germany and its culture and ethnic people are doomed to be extinct ("Volkstod") (Quent, 2019b).

Constructing a state of emergency, this logic leads to a strong sense of urgency. Even further paired with the populist delegitimization of the liberal democracy in Germany, it presents a powerful logic of legitimation for resistance against the establishment. Every fifth tweet of the populist far-right concerns the state of democracy in Germany. They proclaim themselves victims of censorship, state repression and unlawful persecution. Moreover, they argue that the government has lost touch with the lives of the "common man". Instead of listening to the volonté générale of the people and taking action against migration, the government deploys its instruments of repression, namely the police, intelligence services as well as the Antifa. As a result, resistance to this "totalitarian madness" (Sellner, 2019c, par. 39) is not only legitimate and but even a democratic duty.

This logic of a state emergency, state failure and legitimate resistance is powerful and thus highly worrying. Looking at recent cases of right-wing terrorism and violence this notion is omnipresent. In his manifesto called *The Great Replacement,* Brenton Tarrant who murdered 51 people in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, for example, describes himself as a "regular white man, from a regular family. Who decided to take a stand to ensure a future for my children" (Tarrant, 2019, pp. 4). The attacks are conducted to "show the invaders that our lands will never be their lands (…), as long as a white man still lives, they will NEVER (…) replace our people" (ibid.). Referring to Tarrant's manifesto, Patrick Crusius who killed 22 people in a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, stated that his "attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas" and that he is "simply defending (…) (his) country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion" (Ware, 2020, pp. 8). Stephan Ernst, who assassinated the German politician Walter Lübcke, justified his murder by framing it as a punishment for Lübcke being supportive of immigration. Moreover, he wanted to "take a stand against the contemporary state order" (*Zeit Online*, 2020c, par. 5).

Finally, the logic of rightful resistance gains striking relevance to the recent debate about far-right networks within the German armed forces. Headlining "Germany confronts an enemy within" the *New York Times* amongst others draw a troubling picture of a "shadow

army" waiting for a "day X" to conduct a revolution (The New York Times, 2020). This network allegedly centres within the military unit KSK, which presents the most elite special force unit in Germany. Stephan Kramer, the head of the Thuringian branch of the domestic intelligence service, thus rightfully warns: "If the very people who are meant to protect our democracy are plotting against it, we have a big problem" (ibid., par. 7). Considering the above, those far-right networks paradoxically might justify a subversion to themselves by referring to this exact oath to protect the constitution. In several interviews with the *New York Times*, an officer for instance argued: "We are soldiers who are charged with defending this country and then they just opened the borders, no control" (ibid., par. 12). Another one added that it is "about internal unrest because of sleeper cells and worldwide extremist groups, gang formations, terrorist threats" (ibid., par. 16). He portrayed a "Europe under threat from gangs, Islamists and Antifa", calling them "enemy troops on our ground" (ibid., par. 17). By adopting the far-right notion of state and emergency and state failure they hence construct a legitimation for a rightful resistance. As a result, resistance is deemed non-repugnant to their oath and loyalty but instead a necessary consequence of it. Similar to the individual perpetrators they hence follow a fabricated sense of urgency and see themselves as executors of a perceived volonté générale.

Concluding Remarks

Although the populist far-right radical social movement does not explicitly call for the use of violence, they contribute to the emergence of hive terrorism by actively mainstreaming an ideology which is right-wing extremist in nature. They not only lower the thresholds for contact between "ordinary" citizens and extremist beliefs but also provide patterns of argumentation that effectively lower the psychological barriers for the use of severe forms of violence. In other words, while not inciting violence directly they provide everything necessary for it, including a reason, a sense of urgency, an enemy and a powerful pattern of legitimation. In line with Haldenwang, the populist far-right radical social movement does spread linguistic violence which presents a precursor for physical violence as it increases the likelihood for "ordinary" citizens to get involved in acts of right-wing terrorism and violence (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2020).

While the thesis has contributed to Koehler's theoretical model by shedding light on the formerly neglected meso-level of analysis, it, however, cannot prove the model in its entirety. Therefore, further research is strongly needed. Based on the present work,

promising avenues might include demand-side studies which focus on how the societal mainstream experiences the far-right's strategies. Furthermore, micro-level projects could empirically analyse the actual impact of those strategies on individual perpetrators to evaluate their relevance in complex radicalisation processes. Also, given the fact that the populist far-right communicates their ideologies to a mass audience, it might be interesting to study why the vast majority of addressees does eventually not engage in severe acts of violence.

Finally, the thesis once again underlines the necessity of a whole-of-society approach to target the far-right threat. The populist far-right network has shown mastery in avoiding legal prosecution, which limits the opportunities for legal action on behalf of the authorities. Moreover, since attacks are often committed spontaneously and without organisational embeddedness, security agencies face an immense pool of potential perpetrators. This, in return, strongly hampers traditional preventive measures. Therefore, it seems mandatory to increase societal resilience to the far-right's mainstreaming strategies by developing large scale education programmes. In cooperation with civil society actors, those programmes might include workshops in media competency and far-right rhetoric, whereby given the far-right's strategy of self-victimisation, it is crucial to avoid playing the Nazi card. Instead, the focus should be on explaining why the actual proposals of the populist far-right are extremist, i.e. not compatible with the free democratic order. Lastly, due to its focus, the thesis has described the mainstreaming strategies of the far-right network exactly as they are theoretically intended by the far-right leaders themselves. In practice, however, not only the strategies themselves but also the network itself presents several vulnerabilities. Those vulnerabilities need to be found and exploited to weaken the network from within.

6 Appendices

6.1 Patriotic Counterculture

Following their objective to provide a "patriotic" (i.e. far-right) alternative to every topic circulating within mainstream society, the populist far-right also aims at entering contemporary popular culture, respectively the mainstream youth culture. Those efforts go beyond the political arena as they become most visible in the realm of grassroots politics and activism (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). In line with their strategical dissociation with neo-Nazism, populist far-right activists, for one thing, stylistically differ from the hard-edged skinhead dominating the Old-Right subculture (Feischmidt & Hervik, 2015). Instead of wearing black bomber jackets and high combat style boots, they tend to appear in a more modest and "fashionable" way, conveying far-right ideas in a slickly packaged way e.g. through coded symbols (see Lambda) or "ironic" T-shirt prints (Miller-Idriss, 2017). Moving away from the uniformity and brutality of the skinhead and hooligan culture, this not only allows them to blend in with the societal mainstream but also, acknowledging the desire for individualism in contemporary popular culture, enables the activists to "express their own individuality and still be right-wing" (ibid., pp. 8). To still create a form of corporate identity and to financially benefit from this stylistic turn, the populist far-right designs and distributes their own apparel. As shown in Figure 16, the online shop "Phalanx", which is run by IB activists, for example, tries to take up popular trends and give them a far-right spin.

Figure 16: Far-Right Apparel
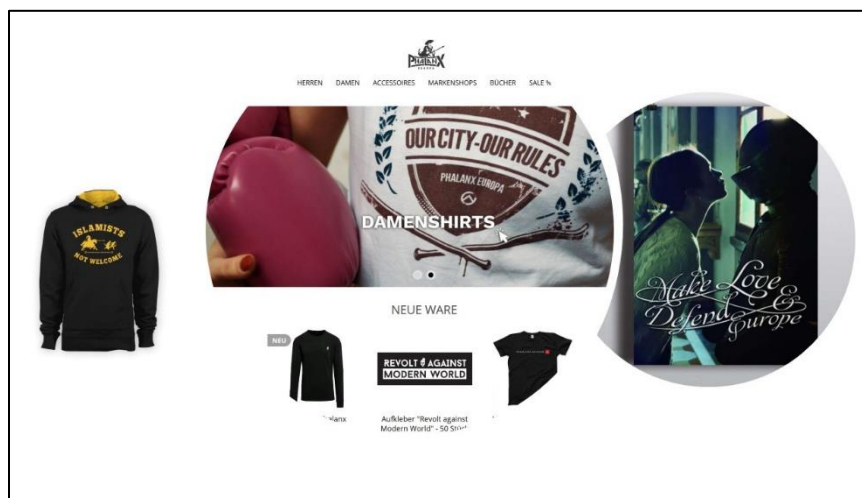
Source: phalanx-europa.com

Disfiguring the well-known slogan "make love not war", the wallpaper on the right, for example, states "make love & defend Europe", while the background shows a traditionally dressed woman air-kissing a knight. Remembering the IB's crusader rhetoric, the wallpaper hence seems to subtly romanticise the idea of defending Europe against Muslims (e.g. reconquista, Vienna1683) and to link it to chivalric virtues such as courage and valour. Looking at the hoodie on the left, the IB-designers attempt to "ironically" modify a prominent theme of pro-refugee movements. Instead of saying "refugees welcome", the hoodie shows a knight hunting a group of people, joined by the slogan "Islamists not welcome". This narrative again touches upon the nativist delusion of a need to defend Europe and expresses a deeply Islamophobic view. To describe this (stylistic) marriage of right-wing ideology and popular culture, American and European media have recently introduced the term "Nipster", which is a neologism formed out of the words Nazi and hipster (Thomas, 2014).

Furthermore, besides changing their appearance, the populist far-right has adjusted its modus operandi. Although traditional forms of far-right activism such as torch rallies or cultic midsummer celebrations are certainly not absent, nowadays they often adopt forms of street action and elements of civil obedience formerly exclusively associated with leftist movements and NGO's (Fielitz & Laloire, 2016). In August 2015, for example, members of the IB climbed Berlin's Brandenburg Gate and enrolled a banner stating "Secure Border and Secure Future" (Deutsche Welle, 2019). In 2017, far-right activists chartered a boat to disturb private sea rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea, and in 2018 they carried out an anti-immigrant mission in the alps, whereby they unveiled a massive banner saying: "closed border: no way (see Figure 16). While such high-risk publicity stunts used to be the trademark of left-wing and environmentalist NGO's including Greenpeace and PETA, herewith the populist far-right attempts to exploit the powerful symbolism which comes with those operations. Moreover, conducting forms of street action that are not only known to the societal mainstream but also often connoted positively, they further pursue the objective of taking up elements already present within the mainstream and give them a patriotic spin. In this context, the strategy paper of the IB, for example, dedicates a specific section to the creation of "iconic images" (Identitäre Bewegung, 2015, pp. 31). Explicitly referring to the well-known pictures of "Greenpeace Whales and crying children in Vietnam" they describe various scenarios that trigger different emotions, including power, strength, victory, martyrdom, sympathy or humiliation (ibid.).

Figure 17: Populist Far-Right vs. Left-Wing/ Environmentalist Activism
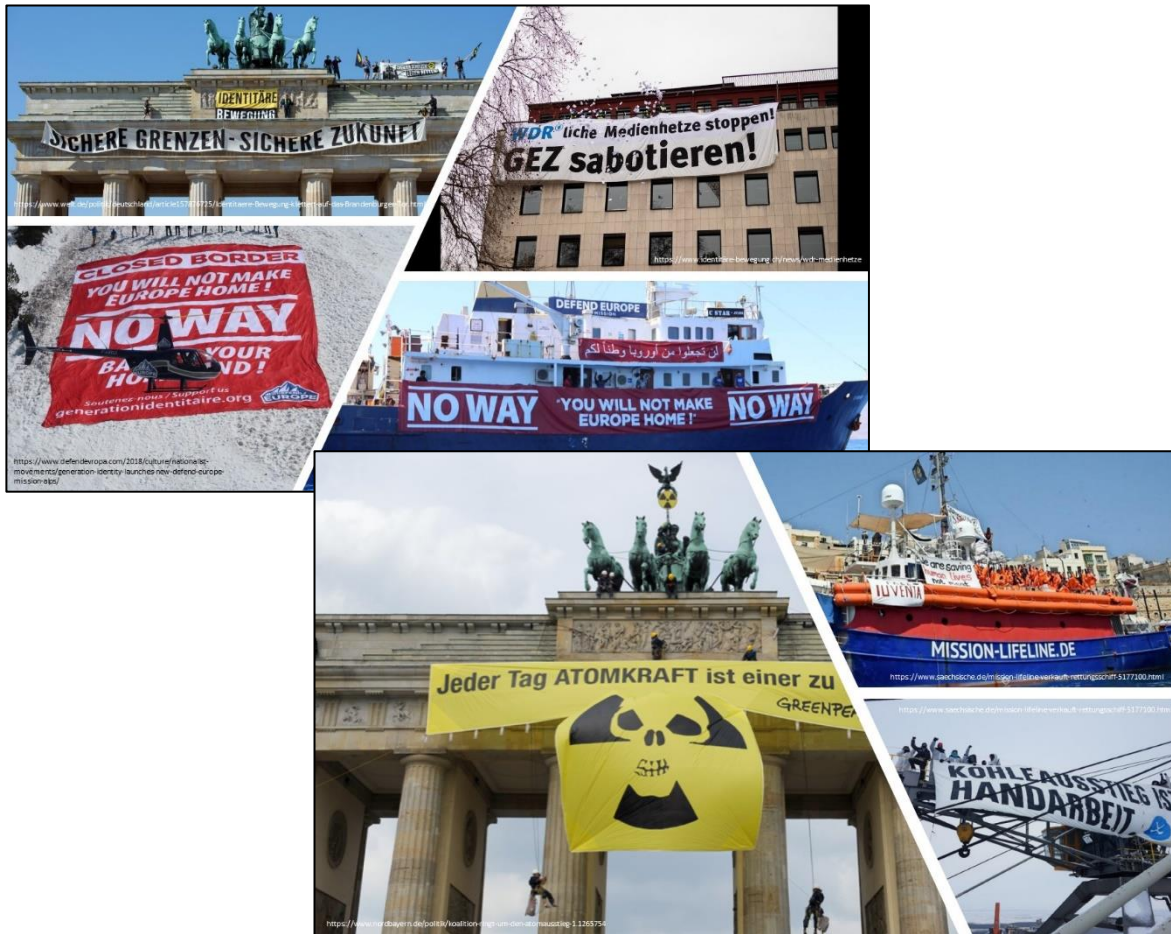
Corresponding with the medial professionalisation mentioned earlier in the paper, they argue that "the media team which covers and distributes the content is as important as the activists themselves" (Identitäre Bewegung, 2015, pp. 31). As key provider of such professional media services, the far-right hybrid "EinProzent" needs to be highlighted. Although their relevance for the populist far-right is often underestimated due to the fact that they mostly operate in the background, empirical data clearly underline their central position within the network. Between March 2019 and February 2020, Ein Prozent not only received the second highest retweet rate overall, but also, as the only organisation within the network, has been retweeted by each organisation of the sample. This in return corresponds with their self-understanding as central PR agency, networking agent, marketer and sponsor within the populist far-right network. Identifying as the "largest patriotic citizen's network in Germany" and "Greenpeace for Germans", they aim at connecting the "resistance" and presenting the main hub for the organisation, planning and propagation of far-right activities (Fuchs & Middelhoff, 2019, par. 3). While grasping Ein Prozent's operations in its entirety requires further (investigative) research, the present social network analysis reveals several

bits of their work. Receiving the 8th highest retweet rate in the network, the YouTube channel "Laut Gedacht", for example, presents an example of the instrumentalization of shiny propaganda videos, nipster presenters, and documentary-style content.

Figure 18: Far-Right Podcasts
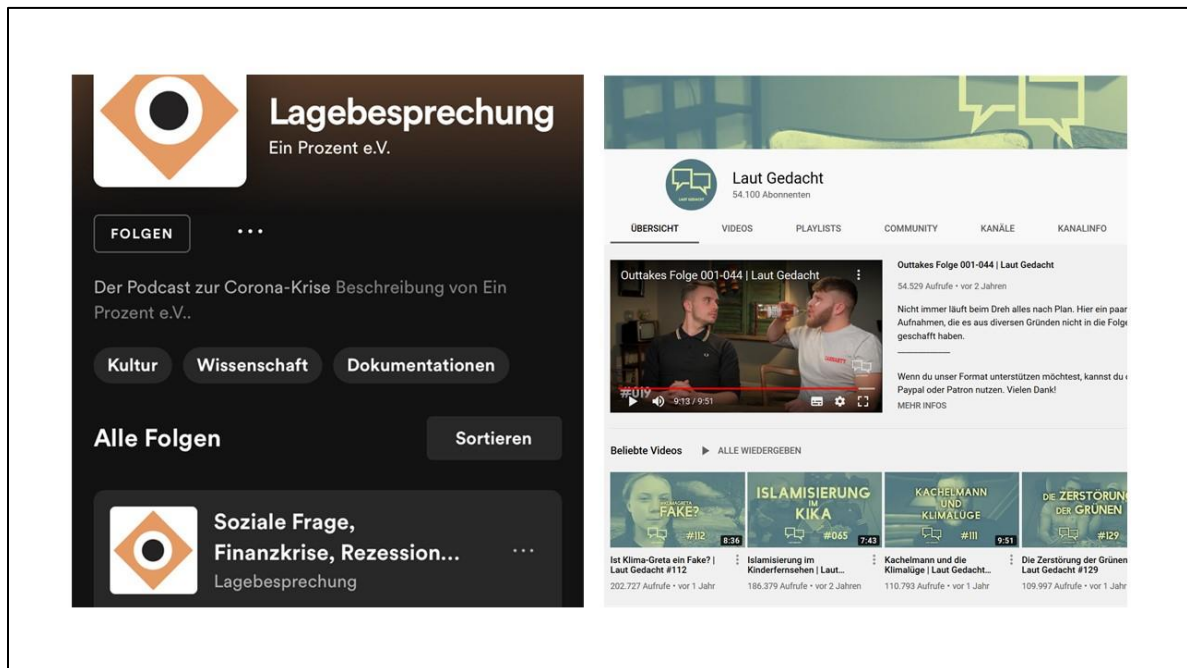
Sources: open.spotify.com; https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCII9X0AMyy21VRwSVBjeBrw

Similar to Ein Prozent's own podcast, which is accessible on the popular music streaming platform "Spotify", they convey far-right messages in a slickly packaged way that makes it immensely difficult to reveal their dangerous core. Together with their professional design and the alleged integrity of platforms such as Spotify, those formats, hence, appear highly innocent and almost require in-depth knowledge about the strategies of the far-right to successfully red-flag them. Accordingly, Laut Gedacht's videos average around 100 000 viewers (see Figure 18).

This troubling assimilation to and infiltration of the contemporary popular culture, furthermore, extends to music, which has traditionally played an important role in far-right sub-cultures (Corte & Edwards, 2008). As opposed to the "White Power Music" of the late 20th century, the music produced and distributed by Ein Prozent and others, however, is specifically designed to fit into contemporary youth culture. By simply copying the beats, appearance and outlet of today's most successful rappers, the "Identitarian" rapper Chris Ares for example, propagates masculinity, Germanic culture, martial arts and "German

values". Moreover, he claims to fight against drugs and to protect German rap from "foreign" influences. While pretending to simply "diss" other rappers, he conveys a deeply nativist, authoritarian and violent ideology. Envying the emergence of a very successful, diverse and multilingual music scene in Germany, he, for instance, states: "We are fighters, a storm gathers, get out of my way you and your autotune-migrant-gang" (Song: Neuer Deutscher Standard, Ares, 2019), and: "Masked punks will be chased through the country with tanks until those maggots will be charged with treason" (Song: Defend Europe, Ares, 2020), or: "We are not an Arab-clan, we do not sell drugs on the soil of our ancestors" (Song: Neuer Deutscher Standard II, Ares, 2020) (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2019). Similar to Laut Gedacht, this strategy is quite successful. In 2019, his song "Neuer Deutscher Standard" (Engl. New German Standard) (shortly) reached the top 10 of iTunes-charts and Amazon-charts. In addition, his songs average around 200 000 views on YouTube, whereby "Widerstand" (Engl.: Resistance) passed the one million mark (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Populist Far-Right Music

Source: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRiVVk9tlEplrmczNkihyDQ
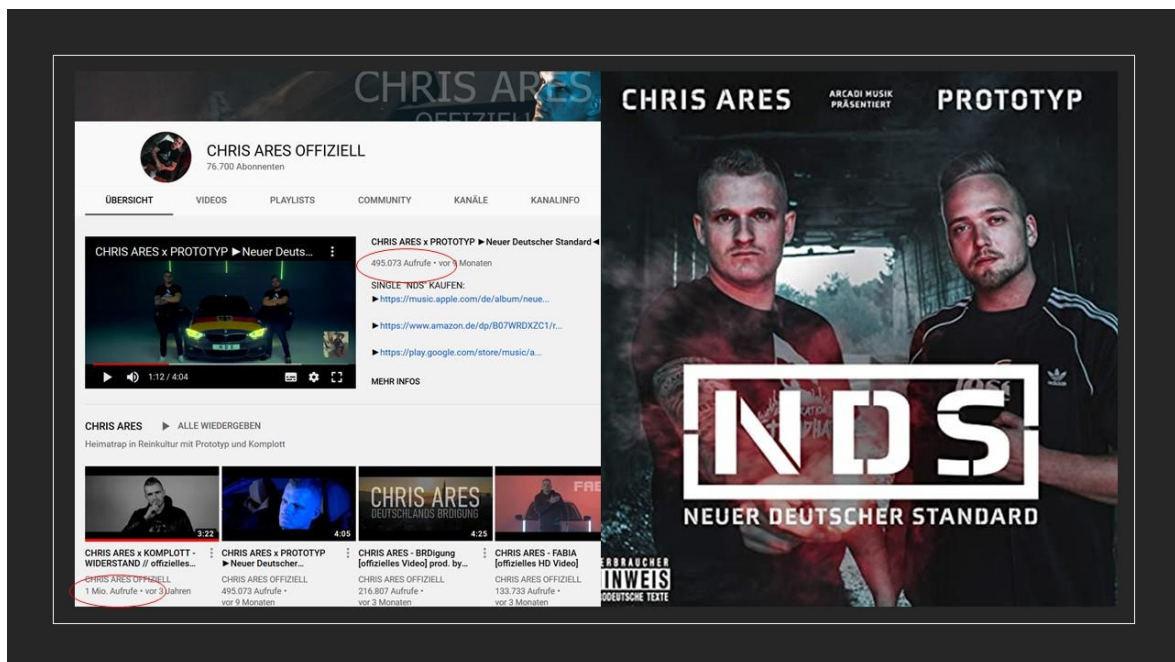
6.2   Description of the Sample

Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland (IB, engl.: Identitarian Movement): The far-right organisation IBD is considered Germany's largest and most active far-right youth network (Deutsche Welle, 2019). With offshoots in over nine European countries, the movement stands for a hybrid form of ethnopluralism based on strong anti-globalist, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiments. Moreover, it promotes the defence of perceived traditions, pan-European nationalism and ethno-cultural homogeneity (Generation Identity, 2019). Hereby, it commonly accuses the so-called establishment, consisting of the established parties, large media outlets as well as the (green-leftist) societal mainstream, of being responsible for an alleged downfall of Germany. While the governing parties are perceived to aim at replacing the white European population with non-European peoples ("Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory"), the green-leftist societal mainstream is viewed as key facilitator of an alleged deterioration of "traditional" values. According to the BfV, specifically due to the IBD's focus on ethnic homogeneity, the organisation is categorised as an anti-democratic and extremist actor (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2020). Today the IBD has around 600 active members. *(Follower: 29.200/ Retweets: 588)*

*PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes, engl.: Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the Occident*):* Founded in 2014 by Dresden businessman and petty criminal Lutz Bachmann, PEGIDA quickly emerged from a small Facebook group to a large-scale social movement. They mobilised thousands of participants to attend their weekly rallies against an alleged "mass migration" and the political and societal establishment. Although support for the movement continuously declined after the so-called European migration crisis, and movement franchises in other Germany cities such as Berlin, Leipzig and Düsseldorf remained insignificant, PEGIDA-rallies in Dresden to date still attract roughly a thousand participants each week. Despite their refusal to be labelled "far-right", there is widespread agreement amongst scholars and the authorities that PEGIDA's core objective of protecting the Judeo-Christian western culture against a perceived Islamisation through migrants from the MENA-region is deeply rooted within the far-right ideological spectre (Pfahl-Traughber, 2016). Moreover, their frequent accusations against Merkel and her cabinet as "Volksverräter" (Engl.: traitors of the people) as well as the introduction of the term "Lügenpresse" (Engl.: lying press) to express a deep distrust against the so-called mainstream media, turn them into an exemplar of a populist far right

movement. In line with Vorländer, Schäller & Herold (2015), due the dynamic and vivid combination of ethnocentric, Islamophobic and racist sentiments as well as a populist rhetoric, PEGIDA nowadays serves as a melting-pot for far-right actors of all shades, including radicals and extremists. *(Follower: 7040/ Tweets: 1198)*

Sezession im Netz (SiN): Published by the so-called Institut für Staatspolitik (IfS, engl.: Institute for State Policy), the *Sezession im Netz* self-identifies as the "most influential rightist intellectual magazine in Germany" (Sezession, 2020). Although neither its print circulation nor its online reach substantiates this claim, they argue that most of the visions, objectives and strategies of the German populist far right have been theoretically and ideologically conceived by SiN authors, respectively within the IfS. In relation to their limited range they point towards their underlying objective of not necessarily reaching a large number of people, but rather the "right" people, who are needed to achieve a reformation of the political system. The SiN as well as the rightist think tank IfS are run by publisher, editor and far-right activist Götz Kubitschek, whom the *New York Times Magazine* recently called "the prophet of Germany's New Right" (Angelos, 2017). In an attempt to theoretically substantiate the ethno-centric ideology of the contemporary populist far-right, Kubitschek aims at forming and educating a rightist-intellectual elite. Hereby, he serves as an influential broker and networker between the different far-right populist groups and individuals, who frequently come together at his mansion in Eastern Germany for workshops, seminars and readings. Besides the IfS and the SiN, Kubitschek moreover owns the publishing company "Verlag Anthaios", which not only publishes the work of key populist far-right leaders in the German-speaking world but also allows him to pursue his quasi-intellectual agenda on book fairs throughout Germany (Fuchs & Middelhoff, 2019a). According to the BfV, due to their relevance for right-wing extremist ambitions and agenda-setting in the meta-political space, the IfS and its outlets including the SiN belong to the sphere of right-wing extremist organisations (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2020). *(Follower: 7002/ Tweets: 1596)*

Björn Höcke (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD): Leading the influential right-wing extremist AfD intra-party fraction "Der Flügel" (Engl.: The wing) as well as the Thuringian branch of the AfD, Björn Höcke arguably presents "one of the most divisive politicians in the country" (BBC, 2020). Pursuing a strong anti-immigration and ethno-centric stance, tinged with populist rhetoric and Nazi overtones, the former history-teacher Höcke often

plays with racial stereotypes and breaks taboos by employing strongly condemnable Nazi-terminology such as "Lebensraum", "völkisch", "degenerated" or "total victory". Although he even polarises within the party itself, the Flügel has been responsible for the largest electoral successes in the history of the AfD. polling over 20 % in the Eastern States Saxony, Thuringia and Brandenburg (ibid.).

Therefore, recently inner party opposition against Höcke's right-wing extremist ideology trickled away. Furthermore, Alexander Gauland, co-chairman of the AfD, announced that Höcke and the Flügel form the very centre of the AfD (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2019). Following these statements, it seems fair to say that Höcke does not present a fringe and isolated section within the AfD but stands as an exemplary for the AfD's journey from being populist euro-sceptic to being populist extreme-right. *(Follower: 40.600/ Tweets: 50)*
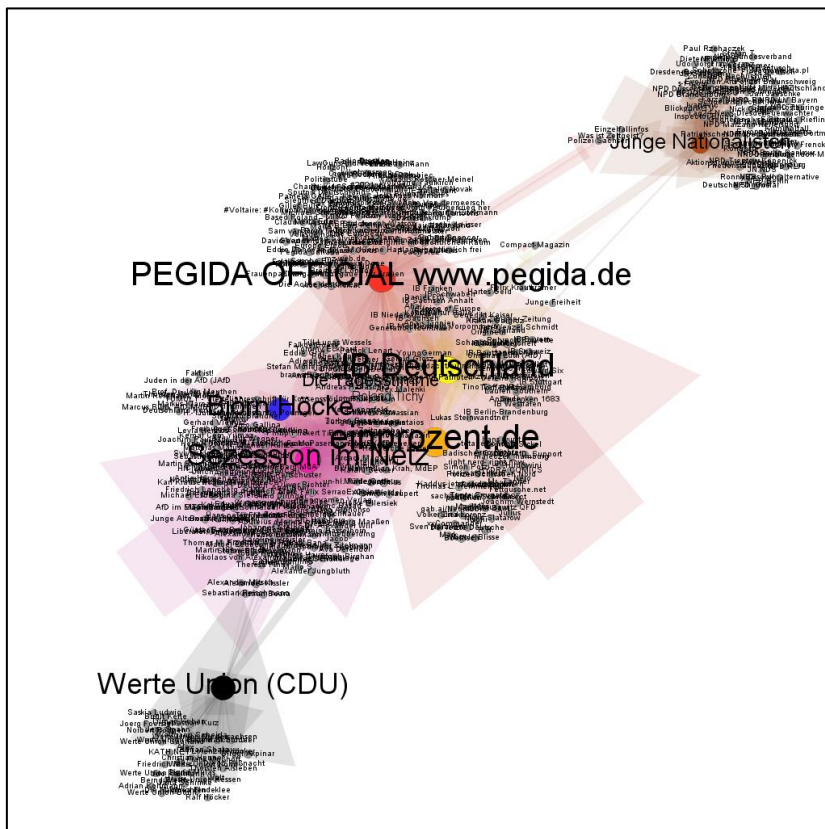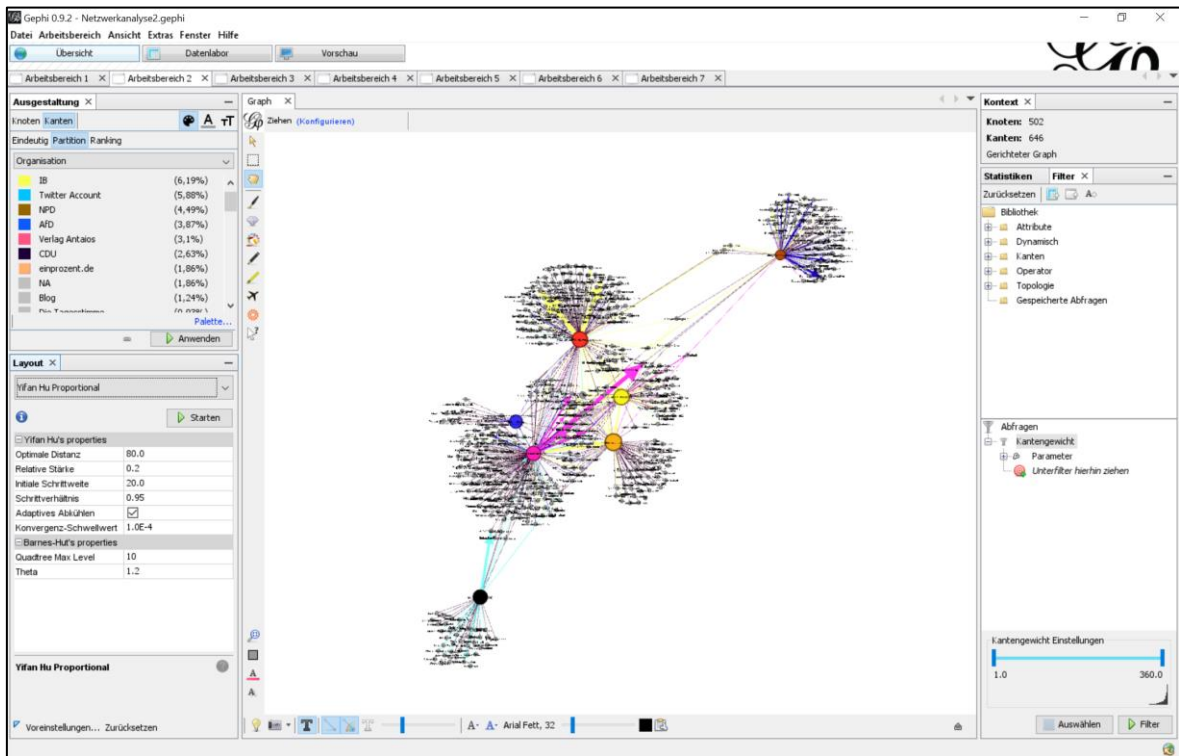
EinProzent (Engl.: One Percent): Founded in 2015, the far-right hybrid "EinProzent" serves as PR agency, networking agent, marketer and sponsor for a vast variety of populist far-right organisations and initiatives both on a regional and on a local level. Based on the underlying objective to unite Germany's far-right, the organisation identifies as the "largest patriotic citizens network in Germany", which aims at connecting the civil resistance and voicing the general will of the supressed people (Fuchs & Middelhoff, 2019b). Hereby, the name "EinProzent" arises from the organisation's key message that it does not need more than one percent of the German population to successfully achieve cultural hegemony in the metapolitical space, which in return is deemed essential for a successful resistance movement and a system change. Working towards this objective, "EinProzent" operates both online and offline, supporting campaigns, initiatives and rallies through shiny propaganda videos, elaborated (social) media strategies and funding. Moreover, the self-proclaimed "Greenpeace for Germans" provides legal support for far-right activists, offers consulting services for far-right grassroot organisations, and organises the monitoring of elections throughout Germany (ibid.). Content-wise, "EinProzent" spreads an anti-immigrant, ethno-pluralist and libertarian message which puts special emphasis on the perceived threat to civil liberties posed by the "political establishment". Portraying the populist far-right as victims of a political and societal witch-hunt, the organisation moreover accuses the established parties of showing an aversion for patriotism and traditions and suppressing dissenting opinions (EinProzent, 2020). In short, EinProzent aims at destabilising the German political system, connecting the "resistance movement" and encouraging grassroot activism. Since

the organisation often stays at the sidelines, so far there has, however, been little academic or administrative attention to the far-right hybrid. *(Follower: 15.100/ Tweets: 227)*

WerteUnion (Engl.: Values Union): As an ultra-conservative grouping within Chancellor Merkel's conservative bloc (CDU/CSU), the WerteUnion generally neither counts as far-right nor as radical or extreme. Nevertheless, recently the small intra-party fraction stood out due to highly controversial statements regarding migration, the idea of a German "Leitkultur" (Engl.: guiding culture) as well as the CDU's relationship to the right-wing, populist AfD. As a result, an intense debate emerged whether to expel the members of the WerteUnion from the CDU and to ban the intra-party section entirely (Tagesschau, 2020). Since the WerteUnion hence arguably presents the rightmost, ultra-conservative edge of the so-called democratic parties, scratching at the door to the populist far-right, it presents a good indictor to test the boundaries of the populist far-right social movement on Twitter. *(23.900/ 396)*

Junge Nationalisten (JN, engl.: Young Nationalists): Founded in 1967, "Junge Nationalisten" presents the youth organisation of the right-wing extremist party Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD, engl.: National Democratic Party of Germany). The NPD is the key political actor in the so-called "Old-Right" which stands for a racist, anti-Semitic and revisionist national-socialist ideology. Identifying as a networking agent between independent Neo-Nazi organisations such as "Kameradschaften" (Engl.: comraderies) or "Bürgerwehren" (Engl.: Home Guards) and the NPD, the JN serves as a useful proxy to test the boundaries of the populist far-right movement in relation to the sphere of extreme right Neo-Nazi actors. *(Follower: 2144/ Tweets: 954)*

6.3 Additional Information: Social Network Analysis

6.4　Content Analysis: Code Book

Grievances

Code	Category	Description
0	**No Grievance**	Tweet does not contain a grievance.
1	**Defective Democracy**	Based on Wolfgang Merkel's (2004) notion of "embedded democracies", defective democracies are "democracies, in which the partial regimes are no longer mutually embedded, the logic of a constitutional democracy becoming disrupted" (pp. 48). As a far-right slur, it hence refers to criticism regarding the current state of democracy. Indicators: • Totalitarian government (e.g totalitarian madness", "Merkel-Diktatur", "Unterdrückungsregime") • Crisis of free speech (e.g. "Meinungsdiktatur", "Lügenpresse", "Systempresse", "Umerziehung", "Indoktrination", demonisation of far-rightness) • State repression: (e.g. BfV as ideologically biased tool, Stasi 2.0, "Polizeistaat", Nazi methods)
2	**Cultural Liberalism**	Tweet criticises the alleged dominance of "green-leftist values" within contemporary society. Indicators: • Gender-related issues (e.g. gender-sensitive language, gender equality, feminism, LGBTQ-rights, crisis of masculinity • Multiculturalism (e.g. "links-grün versifft", „Gutmenschentum", welcome culture) • Missing Patriotism (e.g. "Radical Left and Greens hate Germany")
3	**Migration**	Tweet criticises issues linked to migration, asylum and refugees. Indicators: • Conspiracy theories (e.g. Great Replacement, Islamisation, "Umvolkung", cultural Marxism) • Nativist Messages (e.g. "Foreigners steal our jobs") • Immigrant Criminality (e.g. alleged incidents of knife attacks or sexual assault)
4	**Left-Wing Extremism**	Tweet criticises ideas, proposals and actions, which the far-right perceives as left-wing extremist, i.e. not compatible with the free democratic order. Indicators: • Left-wing violence (e.g. Antifa" as terrorist organisation, alleged attacks against members of the populist far-right, large incidents of left-wing extremism (G20, Connewitz) • Politics (e.g. left-wing extremists in parliament, "radical left media")
5	**Other**	Other grievances

Enemies

Code	Category	Description
Z	**No Enemy**	Tweet does not define an enemy, i.e. someone who is responsible for an identified grievance.
A	**Political Establishment**	Populist term to describe the "ruling class". Tweet is directed against the state and its institutions.
B	**Mainstream Media**	Populist term to describe established online and print media. Tweet is directed against mass media. Indicators: • Fake news (e.g. "Lügenpresse", "Systempresse", "fake news") • Agitation: Mainstream Media is accused of agitating against the far-right
D	**Individual Societal Opponents**	Tweet is directed against a specific individual, group or organisation. Indicators: • Mentioning specific names, addresses, pictures or other contact details of specific societal opponents in relation to a grievance.
E	**European Union**	Tweet is directed against the European Union.
F	**(Perceived) Foreigners**	Tweet is directed against immigrants and/or those who are perceived as foreigners by the populist far-right. Indicators: • Nativist Messages (e.g. "Foreigners steal our jobs") • Immigrant Criminality (e.g. alleged incidents of knife attacks or sexual assault)
G	**Other**	Other enemy

Coding Rules:

We look at tweets that include a grievance, i.e. a cause for complaint or unfair treatment AND/ OR define an enemy, i.e. someone responsible for identified grievances.

Tweets that neither express a grievance nor an enemy will not be considered (off topic posts).

Categories are coded as much as they apply.

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