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Does the Left-Right Ideological Distinction Help Differentiate 'Populist' Communicative Patterns on Social Media?

An Analysis of the Facebook Posts of Two 'Populist' Candidates in the 2017 German Federal Election*

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Abstract

The term 'populist actors' vaguely describes certain political parties and figures on the edges of the ideological spectrum. Theoretically, it assumes that there are similar communicative features among right-left populist actors since they are given the same label. Nevertheless, most studies have indicated that scholars hold contradicting viewpoints on this issue. This dispute continues when scholarly attention is being directed worldwide to the social media communication of right-wing and left-wing populist parties/politicians. In view of the conflicting insights of previous research, this study investigates whether the conventional left-right distinction makes it possible to differentiate populist communicative patterns found on social media. By proposing a theoretical framework combining populist rhetoric and communication styles, we argue that right-wing and left-wing populist actors are alike in using social media to disseminate such populist rhetoric, while sharing similar communicative

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patterns. Combining co-occurrence analysis and social network analysis, this study analyzed Facebook posts made by the radical right AfD top candidate Alice Weidel and the radical left Die Linke top candidate Sahra Wagenknecht during the 2017 federal election period. First, our findings show that all four populist characteristics are present in both candidates' posts. These posts are framed to mobilize voters by taking up 'antagonistic' identities. Second, the populist discourse tends to foster so-called 'horizontal' conflict (i.e., discrimination against minority social groups for the benefit of others) through a patriotic style, as well as 'vertical' conflict (i.e., 'the people' versus 'the elites', 'the establishment') through a crisis rhetoric style.

Keywords: AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), Die Linke ('the Left', 'the Left Party'), Populist Communication, Co-occurrence Semantic Analysis, Text Mining

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I. Introduction

Scholars involved in populism studies agree that populism has become a worldwide phenomenon over the past decades (Moffitt, 2016; Mudde, 2004). While the concept of 'populism' is meant to designate people and views that allegedly pander to a population's baser instincts (i.e. demagoguery), it is often used as a means to discredit political opponents, and rarely as a self-description. As a result, it is highly controversial in academic circles. Given the rise of nationalism and increased tensions between 'outsiders' and 'locals', studies mostly look at the online communications of radical right parties. However, we know far less on the way left-wing 'populist' parties communicate in the digital age. Vagueness over the concept also results in fewer comparative studies of right-wing and left-wing 'populist' communication behaviors.

Amidst a lot of debate and confusion, Mudde's definition of populism — a 'thin-centered ideology' — is probably one of the most cited definitions in recent studies. However, scholars have criticized it, arguing that 'ideology' is an inaccurate term to describe this phenomenon (Aslanidis, 2016). Meanwhile, more political communication scholars have shifted their attention to real-world communication practices ('populism' in political communication) rather than normative questions (what are its features?).

Following the communication-centered approach (Stanyer et al., 2017), this study focuses on the Facebook communication of the top candidates ('Spitzenkandidaten') of two German populist parties. Germany did not used to be a case widely considered in populism studies, but the success of far-right European parties — including the recent rise of Germany's AfD ('Alternative für Deutschland', 'Alternative for Germany') — changed that. Before the AfD gained real traction, Germany's left-wing 'populist' party Die Linke (the Left Party) succeeded in sending MP's to the Federal Parliament in 2009.

By comparing the Facebook campaigns of the two candidates of the AfD and Die Linke, this study hopes to determine whether right-wing and left-wing 'populists' share similar communicative patterns. It has been suggested that future populism studies should highlight communication practices (Engesser et al., 2017; de Vreese et al., 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018; Sengul, 2019). We therefore chose to analyze at the semantic level the Facebook messages that our two candidates posted during the campaign. Using a mixed methods approach

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which combines co-occurrence analysis and social network analysis, this study identifies the latent language structures of the candidates' messages.

II. Literature Review

A. Defining Populism as A Communication Framework

We have seen that 'populism' is a term rather freely bandied about in reference to a variety of phenomena, and that as a result it is highly controversial in academia. Nonetheless, Cas Mudde continues to promote the use of the term, defining it as a 'thin ideology' that pits the so-called 'pure people' against 'the corrupt elites' (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In line with his arguments, similar Manichean viewpoints are applied in other studies (Hawkins et al., 2019; Mény & Surel, 2001; Müller, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Stanley, 2008). Although this minimal consensus is used to examine different cases around the world, thin ideological viewpoints have been criticized, especially by Essex School scholars such as Ernesto Laclau. For Laclau (2005a; 2005b) and his followers, populist discourses stem from the fundamental critique of economic reductionism that is inherent in Marxism. Rejecting the thin ideological approach, they believe that populism creates an anti-hegemonic social identity, which is produced through discourse practice, rather than as a normative characteristic.

Given the lack of an academic consensus, scholars (mostly in the field of political communication) propose to view populism as a communication framework with a focus on the confrontation of the social identities of in- and out-groups (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2017; Aslanidis, 2016; Reinemann et al., 2019). As argued by de Vreese et al. (2018), populism as a communication framework is based on two crucial hypotheses. First, there is the argument that considers populism to be content which highlights its different ideational components (i.e., people-centrism) that are used in political discourse. Second, there is the argument that focuses on populism as a style, assuming that certain stylistic components are prone to be favored in association with the content of populism (Block & Negrine, 2017; Palonen & Kovala, 2018). The latter argument consists of a heterogeneous ensemble of communicative tones which aim to reach specific political purposes (Hofstadter, 2008; Pels, 2003).

By and large, the literature has defined the major ideational features of populism, including people-centrism and anti-establishment sentiment. 'People-

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centrism' is regarded as the core feature of populism — targeting specific population groups to turn into a homogeneous group. 'Populist' politicians claim to be the only ones who really understand people's needs and who are willing to champion them. To frame an adversarial relationship with the political elites/government, they describe these as being the people's enemies. Political actors who use anti-establishment discourses usually accuse governments of betraying 'the people'. By dwelling on the 'conflict' between 'the people' and 'the establishment', they hope to undermine the political legitimacy of the parties/ politicians in question.

Ostracism is sometimes viewed as a defining feature of right-wing populist communication. It is often argued that European right-wing populist parties mostly represent the complete populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), characterizing vivid anti-establishment and nativist exclusionary rhetoric. Despite studies that widely consider European left-wing populist parties to be anti-established parties (Fawzi et al., 2017; Karen et al., 2017), economic exclusion (i.e., the rich) in left-wing populism seems to be less investigated (Hameleers & Vliegenhart, 2019).

Recent research further deepens our understanding of 'the people' as a populist concept, as it is used as an umbrella term for highly diverse ideas of what 'the people' may be. The dimension proposed here is restoring popular sovereignty (Wirth et al., 2016). Unlike 'people-centrism', which proponents claim can fully meet the needs of 'the people', this dimension mostly focuses on ways to mobilize voters and achieve power through speech, by using Manichean discourse in certain contexts (policy debates, elections, etc.).

In regard to discursive styles, changes in the media environment encourage sensational and demagogic messages (Mazzoleni, 2014; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Ernst et al.'s (2019) study provides a comprehensive picture of the communication styles of populism. As a result of factor analysis, their study identified three stylistic dimensions, including negativity (which includes 'negativism' and 'crisis rhetoric'), emotionality ('emotional tone', 'absolutism' and 'patriotism') (Bracciale & Martella, 2017), and sociability ('colloquialism' and 'intimization'). In this view, the use of stylistic components determines how populist parties/politicians gain public traction in highly selective environments of media exposure (Moffitt, 2016).

Overall, this study conceives of populist communication as aiming to emotionally depict a Manichean struggle between in-groups and out-groups

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(communicative purposes). Populist actors express this antagonistic worldview through specific speech styles (communicative styles). The combinations of specific communicative purposes and styles are defined as 'communicative patterns' in this study.

B. Populist Communications of The Left-right Cleavage on Social Media

Current studies show contradicting positions when it comes to answering the question of whether populist communications differ depending on whether it comes from the left or the right. For those studies which are in favor of the arguments that the left-right division matters, policy positions or ideological differences shape the differences. In the case of Dutch parties' voting behavior in the national parliament, a study by Otjes and Louwerse (2015) indicates that their policy stances influence left-/right-wing populist parties' voting behavior. In the case of Donald Trump's and Bernie Sanders's Facebook activity as part of their 2016 nomination campaigns, Jensen and Bang (2017) argued that the right-wing 'populist' communication strategy (Trump's) was characterized by negative, exclusionary, and authoritarian patterns. Conversely, the left-wing 'populist' communication (of Sanders) was based on more positive, tolerant, and participatory communication patterns.

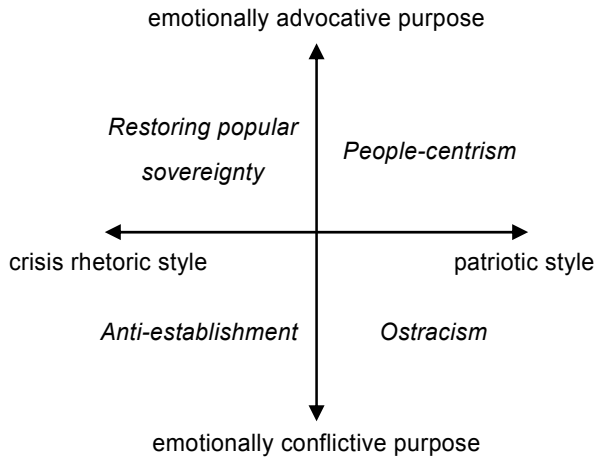
For those studies which are opposed to the former argument, divisions on policies and ideologies appear to have less influence on explaining populist communication. After comprehensively examining the Twitter communications of the main Italian party leaders across the party landscape, a study by Bracciale and Martella (2017) indicated that the right-wing party leader Matteo Salvini (North League, NL) and the left-wing party leader Beppe Grillo (Five Star Movement) adopted the 'champions of the people'-style, characterized by a negative tone of communication and by focusing on immediate campaign concerns. In comparing Nigel Farage (the former party leader of the UKIP) and Hugo Chavez (the former Venezuelan president), both political leaders intended to present themselves as leaders who were trying to protect and save their countries (Block & Negrine, 2017). In terms of rhetorical unity, there might exist more similarities despite there being different social contexts and various policy preferences.

By centering on the related disputes, we are led to the following question: How similar are right-wing and left-wing populist communications? To answer this question, we argue that the communicative purposes (the 'emotionally

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advocative' purpose and the 'emotionally conflictive' purpose) and the communicative styles (the patriotic style and the crisis rhetoric style) are two axes which make it possible to examine the rhetorical practices of left-/right-wing populist communications (see Figure 1). Figure 1 assumes that populist communication patterns contain positive as well as negative aspects. In the case of an emotionally advocative purpose, the populist discourse is people-oriented (the general public, etc.): the populists are always at pains to demonstrate their closeness to the people. Conversely, with an emotionally conflictive purpose, the populist discourse designates the 'enemies of the people' in order to stir fear and hatred at a political elite or at certain social groups. Regarding the communication styles, the patriotic style reinforces positive emotions toward his/her country (i.e., love or pride in the country) (Ernst et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2012). It underlines collective feelings which unite 'the people' and foster heterogeneity between 'the people' and different social groups.[1] The crisis rhetoric style is meant to create conflict by presenting specific policies or social events in a carefully skewed light (Ernst et al., 2019; Moffitt, 2016).

Figure 1 The analytical framework of left-right populist communication



Source: authors

[1] In our study we underline the conceptual differences of patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism refers to positive emotions toward his/her country or which prioritize the role of the country. In contrast, nationalism reflects the nation's supremacy in someone's mind. In most European studies these linguistic characteristics are particularly linked to the right-wing populist narratives.

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The combinations of different purposes and styles further divides into subtypes of populist communication patterns. With the lens of the patriotic style, we argue that the dimensions of people-centrism and ostracism are the two sides of populist communication. We assume that the people-centric message — characterizing the 'emotionally advocative' purpose and the patriotic style — is expressed by stressing symbolic and cultural characteristics ascribed more or less arbitrarily to 'the people'. In other words, 'the people' is a rather vague concept of which its usefulness lies in its plasticity. Prioritizing a common national emotion further inspires rejection of minority social groups whose social backgrounds do not fit the ideology behind the messages. As highlighted earlier, we are not arguing that the left-wing exclusionary rhetoric is ethnic. Rather, populist communication is prone to stress 'people first'. Hence, an ostracist message is characterized by an 'emotionally conflictive' purpose and a patriotic style.

H1. Both right-wing and left-wing 'populists' stress a purported homogeneity of 'the people' through a combination of 'emotionally advocative' communication purposes and a patriotic communication style.

H2. Through a combination of 'emotionally conflictive' communication purposes and a patriotic communication style, both right-wing and left-wing 'populists' call for the exclusion of certain social groups.

With the view of the 'crisis rhetoric' style, the populist Manichean viewpoint is further divided into two subtypes. The 'restoring popular sovereignty' message fits a negative communicative style even though it purports to demonstrate closeness to the people. In fact, it is harmful to people who are endangered owing to the side effects of certain policies. The solutions that populists tend to offer are usually appealing during election times (Gerbaudo, 2018; Waisbord, 2018). Furthermore, fear-mongering plays a role in anti-establishment messages as well. Such messages depict political elites as unscrupulous and self-serving, and more than willing to obliterate people's rights. Here the conflict being engineered is 'vertical', as the discourse emphasizes the asymmetrical power relationship between 'the people' and 'the establishment'.

H3. Both right-wing and left-wing 'populists' call for giving 'the people' more political power, through a combination of 'emotionally advocative' communication purposes and a 'crisis rhetoric' communication style.

H4. Both right-wing and left-wing 'populists' foster anti-establishment feelings through a combination of 'emotionally conflictive' communication purposes and a 'crisis rhetoric' communication style.

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Last, if the communications of both left-wing and right-wing populists share similar patterns, how are they performed in political figures' discourses? We pose the following research question (RQ):

RQ. How are populist communication patterns expressed by our right-wing and left-wing candidates in their Facebook communications?

III. Methodology

A. Case Selection

The analysis of parties' or party leaders' communication behaviors is carried out in most studies. In the German context, the parties' top political candidates are considered to be leaders as well (Dolezal et al., 2014). While differentiating (non-)populist politicians may be something of a challenge (Fawzi et al., 2017; March, 2008), we chose two German political parties that are significantly categorized as populist parties: the right-wing AfD (Alternative for Germany) and the left-wing Die Linke (the Left Party). Given the assumption that populist parties mostly share similar communication patterns, the inter-party comparison is sometimes questioned. Nevertheless, both political parties hold very divergent stances on different issues.

Being a fairly young political party established in early 2013, the AfD is positioned on the far-right of the political spectrum. Given that the development of right-wing populism in Germany has been constrained by public concerns of National Socialism, the astonishing entry of the AfD in the national parliament in 2017 marks a successful milestone for right-wing populism. In regard to policy stances, it is resolutely a Eurosceptic and sharply criticizes EU policies, illustrated by its anti-Euro attitude and anti-European refugee policy (Arzheimer, 2015; Bebnowski & Föster, 2014: Ernst, 2013; Grabow, 2016; Kim, 2017). In line with most European countries, the exclusionary rhetorical feature of right-wing parties driven by a strong nativist attitude further distinguishes its differences from the left-wing parties.

After German unification, the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), a communist party based in Eastern Germany, is considered to be a left-wing populist party. Despite the rapid public acceptance of the PDS, the party attempted to portray itself as the victim of a media campaign (Decker &

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Hartleb, 2007). Born out of the merger of the PDS and the WASG (Labor and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative)[2] in 2007, Die Linke first won its seats at the national level in 2009. Different from the development of the AfD, Die Linke has joined coalition governments in the states (Länder) with other center-left parties. Besides its vivid stance on wealth redistribution and its anti-poverty policies, Die Linke is also the only major German party which is opposed to any military intervention abroad.

Dual leadership — two top candidates are elected to lead the campaign — is one significant feature for many smaller German political parties, e.g., Die Grüne (Green Party), the AfD, and Die Linke. In contrast, a single top candidate is elected in the CDU (Christian Democrat Union), the SPD (Social Democrat Party), and the FDP (Free Democratic Party).[3] In our cases both parties designated two top candidates. Our selection of the parties' top candidates was mainly constrained by two limitations. First, we lacked data for the AfD's Alexander Gauland. With Facebook shutting down access to its APIs, individual researchers were no longer able to retrieve data. Second, since a political party is always a repository of different views, we aimed to avoid inconsistencies between the discourses of different candidates in the same party.

Alice Weidel holds vivid stances on anti-Euro policies, European skepticism and refugee issues (e.g., the Islamization of German society) which are perfectly in line with the party's tone.[4] Her counterpart Alexander Gauland

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2 The merger of the PDS and the WASG in 2007 was driven by the strategic alliance of the two parties. After the unification of East and West Germany, the PDS obtained the electoral triumph which the right-wing populists had dreamed of. However, the poor performance of the PDS in the 2002 federal election had unexpectedly encouraged the collaboration of the PDS with the WASG, the splinter group from the center-left SPD (Socialist Democratic Party), in 2005. Decker and Hartleb (2007) explained that the WASG was a protest party which was mainly against the social and labor market reforms (Hartz IV) under Schröder's cabinet in 2002. The cooperation of the two parties was a win-win situation. Both had expanded their voter bases in the West and East. They, therefore, had higher chances to enter the national parliament.

3 The top candidates in these political parties were also the chairpersons, e.g., Angela Merkel is the CDU's chairwoman and top candidate, Martin Schulz, the former president of the European Parliament, is the same for the SPD, and Christian Lindner is the same for the FDP. Because the CDU and the SPD are usually the two biggest political parties in the federal parliament, their top candidates are also seen as candidates for the chancellor (Kanzlerkandidatur).

4 According to the coverage of SZ (Süddeutsche Zeitung) in 2017, Alice Weidel's candidacy gained media traction because of her background (i.e., being a lesbian)

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holds very similar views, except for his controversial discourse on playing down Nazi history. Sahra Wagenknecht — one crucial leader of the Communist Platform (Kommunistische Plattform, KPF)[5] — joined the PDS in her early political career and was the vice-president of the party's parliamentary group since 2010. Her ideological position is in line with the party's views on financial redistribution, the minimum wage, and anti-military intervention. Her other counterpart Dietmar Bartsch, however, is usually seen as a moderate and reformist force in the party. Based on the aforementioned explanation, we ended up selecting only one candidate per party — Alice Weidel (AfD) and Sahra Wagenknecht (Die Linke).

B. Corpus-building & Textual Processing

We chose Facebook for two reasons. First, the number of German Facebook users has been steadily growing, and the platform is the country's most popular source of digital news (Newmann et al., 2020: 87). Considering the increased weight of social media in political campaigns, Facebook's growing user base in Germany means it plays an important role come election time. Second, the Facebook platform allows more flexibility in producing user content (e.g., without Twitter's character limit). This helps politicians to make more comprehensive arguments on Facebook.

We first noted that top candidates were elected at different points in time. Among major political parties, top Die Linke candidates were at earliest elected on December 4, 2016, and top AfD candidates were at latest elected on April 23, 2017. This means that the earliest party campaigns go back to the end of 2016 when Die Linke officially elected their top candidates. We analyzed Facebook content posted between December 4th, 2016 and September 23th, 2017 (10 months before election day). Facebook posts were collected using R programming language between February and March 2018. Given the timespan we chose, 423 posts of the AfD candidate Alice Weidel and 350 posts of Die Linke candidate Sahra Wagenknecht were harvested (total N=773). The analytical unit is the unigram, referring to a single word in a Facebook post. We further cleaned up the hyperlinks, symbols (e.g., @#), numbers and stop words. Each word in the corpus was automatically tagged with part-of-speech

which does not seem to correspond to the traditional public image to the AfD.

5 The KPF is one of the factions in Die Linke. Following Marxist beliefs, this faction mainly focuses on improving the problems of poverty and racism.

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tagging (POS tagging). Only nouns and adjectives were included in the analysis because we aimed (1) to identify correlated concepts/terms in the Facebook content and (2) to investigate how such concepts were modified. Ultimately, 1301 terms were tagged in the AfD candidate's posts and 1576 terms in the Die Linke candidate's posts.

C. Method

Despite the increasing application of dictionary-based methods (Hameleers & Vliegenhart, 2019; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011), critics often argue that a quantitative approach fails to capture subtle meanings in political texts. Hawkins and Silva (2019) suggest that a traditional human-coded approach can gauge the communicative performances of populists with better accuracy.

For this study we used a semantic network analysis, which includes the advantages of the other two approaches. Originating in the cognitive sciences, this method aims to uncover any meanings, topics or language structures in a given discourse (Drieger, 2013; Veltri, 2020). Semantic network theorists have argued that network structures allow for more than just gauging the significance of concepts. Network structures offer more dynamic analytical perspectives for researchers use to dig out the relationships between words or concepts.

Semantic network analysis can be conducted through the combination of various methods. We used co-occurrence analysis to measure word pair weights and relationships. This method finds correlated word pairs by literally measuring distances or collocations for any two words (Leetura, 2012). The idea is that the closer the words are in a political text, the higher their correlations. In this study, correlations of word pairs, composed of nouns and adjectives, were computed based on word distances in the posts. By using the R package UDPipe (Wijffels, 2018), 3813 word pairs for Weidel and 4613 word pairs for Wagenknecht were found.

Social network analysis (SNA) was further applied to uncover the language structures of our candidates' posts. We imported the co-occurrence results in Gephi, an SNA open-sourced software package. In our analysis, 'nodes' in networks represent words or concepts, and 'edges' refer to the co-occurred frequencies. Overlapped words are identified as a single network node. All network nodes are undirected, meaning that directions in relation with any given word are not identified.

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In order to answer the RQ, we applied the detection of the network community to visualize the semantic network structures and uncover the language patterns of both of the parties' top candidates. The networks are colored by the different network communities. Network node weights are measured based on degree centrality and betweenness centrality. The measurement of degree centrality is defined as the total number of edges per node: the more edges, the more important the node. The results of degree centrality tell us what terms are more frequently used in the top candidates' Facebook discourses. The measurement of betweenness centrality is another way to judge the importance of the network nodes. Different from our former assumption that node importance equals the number of edges a node has, the scores of betweenness centrality rely on the assumption of the shortest path, which means the path with minimum edges between two given network nodes. Hence, the nodes with higher betweenness centrality can be interpreted as being nodes which bridge any given two other nodes. In other words, while the former indicates the frequencies of the terms in the discourse, the latter indicates the important terms that represent the main discursive features.

The analysis of semantic networks was further used to examine the hypotheses. As pointed out in numerous studies, people-centric rhetoric includes terms referring explicitly or implicitly to the people (i.e., citizens, people). In contrast, anti-establishment rhetoric (e.g., anti-government) and exclusionary rhetoric (e.g., 'anti-refugees' for right-wing exclusion, 'anti-rich' for left-wing exclusion) are clearly identified. As for the stylistic dimension, there were fewer studies that delved into operationalizing relevant keywords. Based on our theoretical argument, terms describing the country or the land people live on were defined as references of the 'patriotic style'. Social conflicts are presented through the skewed light of specific policies or social events; hence we defined terms referring to policies and events as references of the 'crisis rhetoric style'.

IV. Analysis

We first look at how populist rhetoric is used in Weidel's and Wagenknecht's semantic networks (RQ). Weidel's semantic network contains 856 nodes and 3813 edges, and Wagenknecht's semantic network contains 918 nodes and 4613 edges. We inspected the terms in both political figures' semantic networks (see Table 1). In Weidel's semantic network, 'German' has the highest degree

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centrality (=126). 'Top candidate' ranks second (degree centrality=99). The following terms include patriotic rhetoric ('country', 'state'), people-centric rhetoric ('child', 'family'), and anti-establishment rhetoric ('politician', 'politics'). In Wagenknecht's semantic network, degree centralities of 'social' (=115) and 'good' (=97) are significantly higher than other terms. The terms in Table 1 can also be divided into the following categories: anti-establishment rhetoric ('politics' and 'coalition'), patriotic rhetoric ('German' and 'country'), people-centric rhetoric ('human being'), and rhetoric of crisis ('justice').

Table 1 Top nodes of the top populist candidates' semantic networks (ranked by degree centrality)

Weidel's (AfD) semantic network		Wagenknecht's (Die Linke) semantic network	
Nodes: 856 Edges: 3813		Nodes: 918 Edges: 4613	
Nodes	Degree centrality	Nodes	Degree centrality
German (deutsch)	126	social (sozial)	115
top candidate (Spitzenkandidaten)	99	good (gut)	97
country (Land)	76	year (Jahr)	83
year (Jahr)	64	politics/policy (Politik)	79
time (Zeit)	62	great (groß)	75
child (Kind)	58	German (deutsch)	71
press conference (Pressmitteilung)	57	country (Land)	67
demand (Forderung)	49	justice (Gerechtigkeit)	65
state (Staat)	48	Linke (Left)	51
politics/policy (Politik)	47	coalition (Koalition)	51
family (Familie)	42	human being (Mensch)	50
politician (Politiker)	39	result (Ergebnis)	50

Source: authors

Since the semantic networks are built on co-occurrence results, the results of degree centrality highlight what rhetorical concepts are favored by the top candidates' Facebook communications. Furthermore, comparing the terms of both political figures' semantic networks, some are overlapping, such as 'German', 'country', 'year', and 'politics'. These terms may become rhetorical hints to further dig out how both top candidates organize their Facebook discourses.

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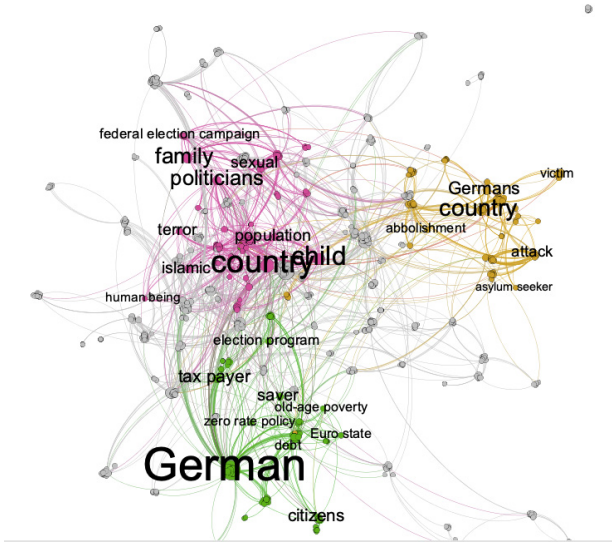
By detecting communities in both the semantic networks of the AfD's and Die Linke's top candidates, 53 communities in Weidel's semantic network and 55 in Wagenknecht's were found. Although a large number of network communities were uncovered, we did not go through all of them because most of them cover very small proportions of nodes — over half of the communities in both semantic networks retain less than one percent of the nodes. It means that these network communities offer little information helpful for depicting the political figures' communicative patterns. Instead, the top three largest network communities were picked in order to illustrate how right- and left-wing populist political figures communicate.

The largest two communities in Weidel's semantic network contain almost 11 percent of the nodes, which means that around 200 words in both network communities are explained. The third largest community also covers 10 percent of the nodes (about 85 to 90 words are explained). Compared to Weidel's semantic network, the largest community in Wagenknecht's semantic network contains around 19.6 percent of the nodes, and the second and third semantic communities cover 8 percent of nodes respectively. In total, 32.24 percent of the nodes in the former semantic network and 35.84 percent of the nodes in the latter semantic network are examined. The colored network communities in Figure 2 are named: 'critics of the European Central Bank (ECB)' (the green network community), 'Potentially Islamic effects to German society' (the pink network community), and 'German fear to terror attacks' (the brown network community). The colored network communities in Figure 3 are named as follows: 'Framing antagonistic viewpoints by stressing issues of social justice' (the green network community), 'Party's vision of the welfare state' (the pink network community), and 'Anti-governmental military intervention' (the brown network community).

By scrutinizing the top three semantic network communities, the two top candidates' communicative patterns are clearly mapped out. We start from the AfD/Weidel's semantic network. Based on words selected from the network, one community relates to the EU monetary policy, and two focus on the negative effects of refugees for German society. While the results of the degree centrality tell us what terms are frequently used in the top candidates' Facebook communications, we are interested further in knowing how these terms contribute to the network communities. As shown in Table 2, we calculated betweenness centrality, which explains what terms are used as connectors to bridge between two or more individual concepts. In the first community, the term 'German' has

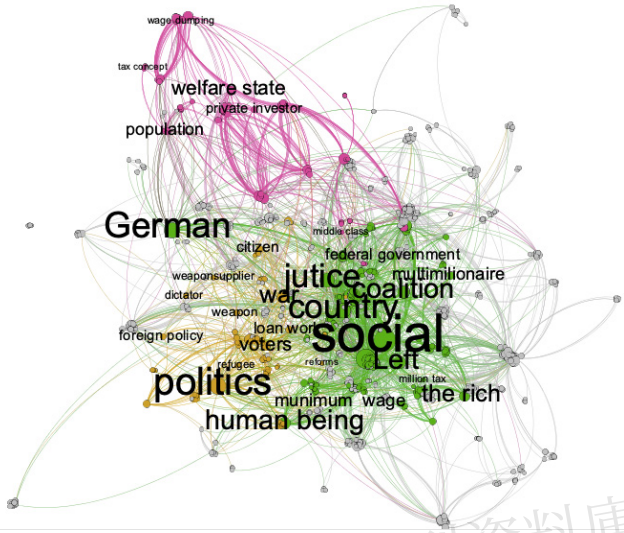
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Figure 2 The right-wing populist semantic network (Alice Weidel, AfD)



Notes: The network colors represent network communities. The node size is determined by the degree centrality.
Source: authors

Figure 3 The left-wing populist semantic network (Sahra Wagenknecht, Die Linke)



Notes: The network colors represent network communities. The node size is determined by the degree centrality.
Source: authors

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Table 2 Nodes and centrality measures of Weidel's semantic network

Nodes: 856 Edges: 3813			Type of network: Undirected Selected network communities: 3 (32.24 percent of nodes)					
Community 1: Critics to European Central Bank (ECB)			Community 2: Potentially Islamic effects to German society			Community 3: German fear to terror attacks		
Nodes	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality	Nodes	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality	Nodes	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality
German (deutsch)	126	65300	country (Land)	76	24631	country (Staat)	48	20713
tax payer (Steuerzahler)	26	3257	child (Kind)	58	13536	Germans (Deutsche)	26	3788
citizen (Bürger)	25	9601	family (Familie)	42	15588	attack (Anschlag)	18	1846
saver (Sparer)	23	6403	politician (Politiker)	39	9033	victim (Opfer)	11	2093
election program (Wahlgrogramm)	14	1783	population (Bevölkerung)	22	4043	abolishment (Abschaffung)	11	0
old-age poverty (Alterarmut)	11	0	terror (Terror)	21	3049	asylum seeker (Asylbewerber)	6	0
Euro state (Eurostaat)	11	0	sexual (sexuell)	21	1310			
zero rate policy (Nullzinspolitik)	11	0	Islamic (islamisch)	21	1246			
debt (Schuldenberg)	11	0	federal election campaign (Bundestagswahlkampf)	13	344			

Source: authors

the highest betweenness and degree centralities. Also, its centralities are significantly higher than that of other terms in the same community. It tells us that in this community this term is used the most and plays the most important role for which arguments are built upon.

The first community mainly reveals Weidel's criticisms of the European Central Bank's (ECB) policies intended to rescue Southern European economies. Further, she blamed the ECB's financial rescue policy on being dominated by Southern European states that are suffering from national debt crises. For instance:

> "… the ECB's illegal bailout packages are a trillion Euro pit, and German savers are being robbed owing to zero interest rates." (example from the 1st community)

> "Having surrendered sovereignty over monetary policy to the ECB, which is dominated by the southern European states, is increasingly turning out to be a curse for German taxpayers and savers." (example from the 1st community)

The topics of the second and third communities are slightly different even though they focus on refugee problems. Referring to betweenness centrality, 'country' (Land) contributes to the second community the most. However, differing from the results of degree centrality, the term 'family' has slightly higher betweenness centrality than 'child'. In the third community, the terms 'country' (Staat) and 'Germans' still rank in the first top two places. However, 'victim' has a higher value than 'attack'. Hence, we argue that the second community mainly puts its attention on the potential social effects of Islamic culture, and the third mainly aims to evoke people's fear of Islamic terror attacks. Both network communities are illustrated by offering the following extracted content from the posts.

> "From 2018 onwards, 390,000 Syrians will ensure that their families will reunite, which will continue to change the country dramatically." (example from the 2nd community)

> On the murder of a child by a convicted Afghan refugee, the AfD top candidate Alice Weidel explains: "This terrible report was completely lost due to the terrorist attacks in London: A convicted refugee in Afghanistan kills a small child despite an ankle cuff and allegedly strict observation." (example from the 2nd community)

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> "Unfortunately, the London attack is one of many on European soil, to be more precise, the twelfth Islamist act of terrorism this year." (example from the 3rd community)

Compared to the main semantic topics in Weidel's network, Wagenknecht's top three semantic communities have different themes (see Table 3). In the first community, the results of betweenness centrality tell us that more terms contribute to the topic even though the term 'social' has a significantly higher degree centrality than the other nodes. We find that 'German', 'country', 'Left', and 'human being' rank higher as well. We argue that this network community puts particular attention on promoting the party's socialist positions. The content of one post has been extracted as follows.

> "We say: lower taxes for small and medium-sized incomes, introduce a millionaire tax, expand social services and infrastructure!" (example from the 1st community)

> "How does Schulz (top candidate of Social Democrat Party, SPD) want to make policies for the hard-working people when he praises the Chancellor in the same breath, who pulled the social soil from under their feet with his agenda politics?" (example from the 1st community)

The second network community specifies depicting relationships of 'the people' and the party's vision of the welfare state. Although the term 'welfare state' has the highest degree of centrality, its betweenness centrality is obviously lower than the term 'population'. But it does not affect how we interpret this topic.

> "My alternative: finally to allow the vast majority of the German population to participate appropriately in economic development through significantly higher wages, pensions and public investments!" (example from the 2nd community)

The topic from the third network community seems to relate less to the party's vision of the social welfare state. We find that the term 'politics/policy' shows the highest centrality measures among other nodes in the same community. The term 'war', which ranks in the second place, illustrates Die Linke's vivid position against Germany's military intervention. This is significantly different from other parties.

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Table 3 Nodes and centrality measures of Wagenknecht's semantic network

Nodes: 918 Edges: 4613			Type of network: Undirected Selected network communities: 3 (35.84 percent of nodes)					
Community 1: Framing antagonistic viewpoints by stressing issues of social justice			Community 2: Party's vision of the welfare state			Community 3: Anti-governmental military intervention		
Nodes	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality	Nodes	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality	Nodes	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality
social (sozial)	115	36498	welfare state (Sozialstaat)	31	4795	politics/policy (Politik)	79	36191
German (deutsch)	71	30991	population (Bewölkerung)	23	6175	war (Krieg)	42	11437
country (Land)	67	22385	private investor (Privatinvestor)	15	0	voters (Wähler)	29	4356
justice (Gerechtigkeit)	65	7169	wage dumping (Lohndumping)	5	352	citizen (Bürger)	18	890
Left (Linke)	51	13909	middle class (Mittelschichtt)	5	137	foreign policy (Außenpolitik)	15	2024
coalition (Koalition)	51	6867	tax concept (Steuerkonzept)	3	0	weapon (Waffe)	12	648
human being (Mensch)	50	12135				dictator (Diktator)	9	0
the rich (Superreich)	41	7800				weapon supplier (Waffelieferant)	9	0
minimum wage (Mindestlohn)	25	2917				refugee (Flüchtling)	7	0
multimillionaire (Multimillionäre)	24	1467						
federal government (Bundesregierung)	19	2620						

Source: authors

> "In contrast to the AfD and the other parties represented in the Bundestag, I (Wagenknecht) have attributed Merkel's joint responsibility for the terrorist attack in Berlin primarily to her foreign policy, her participation in the US oil and gas wars in the Middle East." (example from the 3rd community)

Through our analysis we found that people-centric and patriotic discursive patterns are used in all of Weidel's three semantic network communities and in one (the first community) of Wagenknecht's (H1). Making reference to both centrality measurements, patriotic terms play especially crucial roles in creating the symbolic homogeneous feeling. With the combination of different terms, the notions of 'the people' can be constructed differently or similarly. On the other hand, highlighting the symbolic homogeneous feelings divides the confrontations of certain social groups and the people (H2). This communicative pattern can be found in the second and third network topics in Weidel's network, and in the first one in Wagenknecht's network.

With the intentional manipulation of linking specific social events or policies with 'the people', the dimension of 'restoring popular sovereignty' is also displayed (H3). Except for the third network community in Weidel's semantic network, we found that other topics put their criticisms on the failures of specific policies. This linkage of 'the people' and the discontent with policy failure are further extended to the party's election program in Weidel's first and second network community, meaning that these issues are particularly emphasized on the election agenda. Through adopting a crisis rhetoric style led by the people's discontent with policies, political elites are also depicted as the ones who stand against 'the people' in most of the network topics of both top candidates (H4). Here, we highlight that the European Union (EU) is criticized (the first community in Weidel's network), while EU criticism is not central in Wagenknecht's Facebook discourse.

Through the comparison of both of the semantic network results, we have come to consider that the relationships of the people and social groups are also driven by different emotions in the right- and left-wing populist discourses. While fear is the main emotion which evokes people's cautiousness to foreign culture, deprivation also causes people to have discontent with rich people. In fact, it reflects the basic difference on how right-wingers and left-wingers view the world and how social conflicts are solved.

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V. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The main question we asked in this study was whether or not right-wing and left-wing 'populist' communicative patterns are similar. Previous studies have mostly focused on the communicative patterns of a single populist party or politician in different countries. However, definitional vagueness resulted in diverging conclusions and arguments. By defining populism as a communicative framework, we assume that both right-wing and left-wing populist communications express antagonistic worldviews and identities through similar communicative patterns, including their purposes and stylistic dimensions.

Against the backdrop that the AfD and the Die Linke have very different viewpoints and opinions on issues, and that they are labeled as two radical parties on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, we conclude that the conventional left-right distinction may be of little help in differentiating 'populist' communicative patterns, since both our right-wing and left-wing candidates referred to our four 'populist' ideas in their Facebook content. However, we do not claim that differences on policy issues do not matter since our analysis detected divergent topics in both party candidates' Facebook posts.

What makes their communication patterns similar is still mainly related to party extremism and party competition, and these should be discussed in light of broader social and political constraints. The AfD has been facing increased social and political pressure, and has been unable to breach the 'cordon sanitaire' put up by the mainstream parties, and in response to public concerns about the party's sympathies for the country's National Socialist past. Therefore, the AfD's use of a populist rhetoric is to make their voice more readily heard than other parties within the context of party competition.

Compared to the political and social pressures that the AfD met, Die Linke has not suffered from similar political pressure. In fact, it has already gained parliamentary seats at the local and national levels, such as becoming one of the counterparts of the governmental coalitions with the other center-left parties of the SPD (Social Democrat Party) and the Grüne (Green party) in Berlin, Brandenburg, and Bremen. The populist tendency of Die Linke is still attributed to its election strategies (see Decker & Hartleb, 2007).

In addition, the party votes (the second vote) of both parties mainly comes

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from the Eastern states of Germany. It tells us that both of them still successfully represent the groups of victims who are unsatisfied with the political status quo when it comes to globalization. That explains why some wage issues dominate the top candidates' Facebook discourses (refugee issues, economic and financial issues, views on the EU/Euroscepticism, etc.). It is noteworthy that the Die Linke candidate did talk about refugees. However, unlike Alice Weidel, Sahra Wagenknecht did not depict refugees or immigrants as an internal threat. Instead, through underlining the refugee problem, she strongly criticized German and EU policies of military intervention in the Middle East.

While it has been proven that writing personalized content (e.g., stressing personal issues, describing personal traits, etc.) is likely used by mainstream parties (Bracciale & Martella, 2017), the cases we selected seem to serve their campaign purposes. In particular, in our case, divisions of the in-group and out-group are significantly manipulated by communication in two different speech styles. The significant tendency toward populist rhetoric is not only because of the extreme positions of the AfD and Die Linke. As Ernst et al. (2017) pointed out, their 'populist' rhetoric on social media became more strident as they moved toward extremism. Through describing antagonistic and dichotomous identities, both of the parties' political appeals can disseminate rapidly.

Finally, we will discuss the implications of this study. First, it resonates with an academic dispute that we are interested in — the question of whether the feature of exclusionary rhetoric is unique to right-wing populism. Our answer is no. While ethnic and nativist exclusion is mostly defined, the meanings of features of exclusionary rhetoric should be broader. Second, we argue that both of the stylistic indicators in our framework help further explain the framing of the in-group's and out-group's feelings. On the one hand, both candidates foster a people-centric identity by stressing that members of 'the people' should at least have some social experiences in common (cf. Block & Negrine, 2017). On the other hand, they strive to demonize the political elites (the government and the EU) and ask for popular support by emphasizing the risks and failures associated with their counterparts' policies. We note that Moffitt's (2016) theory also incorporates ideological elements and communicative styles. However, our findings demonstrate that depending on the underlying purpose, a given communicative style can play different roles and facilitate the formation of specific positive or negative social identities. Hence, any communicative style is a double-edged sword.

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By selecting the Facebook communications of two top candidates of the German radical right- and left-wing parties, this study made an attempt to indicate similarities of communication behavior in both right- and left-wing populist communications. As long as the political middle is being decimated and both the political and ideological spaces on the right and the left are being created in the Internet age, the societal confrontation will be deepened.

This study also faced several research pitfalls that could be considered in future studies. First, if the societal confrontations caused by social media communications are unavoidable, perhaps we have to consider how mainstream parties tend to react to the disappearance of the political middle. Do mainstream political actors communicate in the same fashion (for example, Schmuck & Hameleers, 2019)? Are there 'populist' ideas to be found in their communications? Can we find some features common to the social media communications of all political actors?

Second, 'populism' could be a prevalent communication phenomenon characterizing all political parties, regardless of any differences between them. This assumption has been proven in our analysis. This raises a new question: what are the 'populist' elements of a given party's ideology and communication? In other words, is 'populism' still a relevant descriptor of specific political actors? Or is it no more than an abstract concept applicable to any political force, to a variable extent? Our analysis may partly answer these questions. However, there is a need for more comprehensive research. For instance, mainstream political actors should be included in future studies.

Third, 'populism' seems to have become a global phenomenon — but studies of its Asian incarnations are few and far between. We acknowledge that our viewpoints and indicators of 'populist' ideas, communicative purposes, and styles are mostly based on Western studies. And Western perspectives will not necessarily fit different political cultures. Particularly, we conclude that the left-right division proves of little help to distinguish between the radical right and left parties in Germany. Whether or not Asian political experiences are in support of this finding remains to be studied.

Method-wise, the mixed method approach combining co-occurrence analysis and network analysis helps researchers discover term relationships and further extract meanings in political texts. As the dictionary-based method is increasingly applied in relevant studies, our findings could contribute to the establishment

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of such dictionaries. In particular, the people-centric, anti-establishment sentiment, and the right-wing and left-wing exclusionary terms are well documented, but stylistic indicators are still underdeveloped. So far, stylistic indicators are mostly coded manually. We consider the extracting terms belonging to the patriotic style and the crisis rhetoric style in our analysis to be the first step in that direction, which could be further developed in future studies.

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左右意識形態是否能分辨社群媒體上的民粹傳播模式？

以德國 2017 年聯邦議會選舉兩位民粹政黨候選人的臉書貼文爲例*

林駿棋**、Leen d'Haenens***、廖達琪****

摘　要

「民粹行爲者」一詞經常含糊地用來描述在意識形態光譜上處於極端兩側的政黨以及政治人物，理論上假設既然他們被歸類在同一個類別，左右派民粹行爲者之間應該有許多共通的傳播特徵，然而多數研究卻對此抱持相左的意見。當學界逐漸開始關注左右翼民粹政黨／民粹人物的社群媒體傳播行爲時，這個爭論依然持續著。鑑於過去研究相互衝突的論點，本文探究傳統左右意識形態的差別是否可能區分社群媒體上的民粹傳播模式。透過提出一個結合民粹語言與傳播風格的理論框架，本研究論證左右翼民粹行爲者在利用社群媒體傳播民粹式語言的同時，雙方有著相似的論述模式。本研究結合共詞分析與社會網絡分析，分析德國極右派「德國另類選擇黨」（AfD）領先候選人 Alice Weidel 以及極左派「左翼黨」（Die Linke）領先候選人 Sahra Wagenknecht 在 2017 年聯邦議會競選期間的臉書貼文。首先，本研究指出兩位政黨候選人的論述模式皆符合四個民粹傳播特徵，且嘗試透

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過形塑敵我對立的社會認同動員選民；第二，一方面「愛國宣示」的風格強化民粹論述中人民與少數社會群體之間的差異，另一方面「危機強調」的風格則是透過議題操作強化人民與政治菁英的衝突。

關鍵詞：德國另類選擇黨、德國左翼黨、民粹傳播、共詞語意分析、文字探勘

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