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**Multimodal Analysis of European Populist Discourse
The Case of the German AfD Election Posters in 2021**

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Abstract

Alternative für Deutschland [AfD], a German radical right-wing populist party, is the most successful party among all the German right wings after World War II. This thesis multimodally analyses populist discourses in AfD's posters for the most recent Bundestag election to identify its campaign strategy. It tries to fill two research gaps: little visual analysis in populism research and little research on the 2021 Bundestag election campaign. The research question is: What strategies can be read from AfD's election posters in 2021 within the historical and socio-political context of Germany? Multimodal discourse analysis [MDA] was used to examine 19 election posters of AfD for the 2021 Bundestag election, which are issue-oriented and contain photos. Further comparative analysis was carried out using 2021 Facebook posts and 2017 posters.

The analysis reveals the factors that give the AfD's 2021 posters a unified and moderate impression, the intended target groups and the discourses embedded in the posters. Most of the AfD's strategy was typical populist; however, it also had rare features of European radical right-wing populist parties, such as no Eurosceptic element or no depiction of demonising outsiders. Moreover, AfD made new attempts to portray a second-generation immigrant as on "our" side. They are a significant change compared to the 2017 posters, but not a change in ideology itself. The AfD's strategy for the 2021 posters is to euphemise the exclusion of outsiders and avoid criticism that AfD is xenophobic. Also, some Facebook posts having a relatively limited audience contain salient xenophobic elements. By using different campaign tools and design approaches depending on the target group, the AfD's strategy became more professionalised.

Keywords: populism; Germany; AfD; Bundestag; election campaign; election poster; multimodal discourse analysis

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Multimodal Analysis of European Populist Discourse

The Case of the German AfD Election Posters in 2021

1 Introduction

The 20th Bundestag election took place in Germany on September 26, 2021. It was the third federal-level election for Alternative für Deutschland [AfD], a German radical right-wing populist party. This party was initially founded in February 2013 as an anti-Euro party,¹ which could not enter the Bundestag in the 2013 election because of the Five-Percent Hurdle.² However, this situation changed after the refugee and migrant crisis of 2015. The shift in strategy toward an extreme anti-immigration and anti-Islam stance allowed AfD to enter the Bundestag for the first time in 2017 and become the third-largest party with 94 seats.³ What is more, AfD also gained 11 seats in the 2019 European Parliament [EP], forming the Identity and Democracy Group with other European populist parties such as the French National Front, now National Rally [FN/RN], and the Italian Lega.⁴ AfD is the most successful party among all the German right wings after World War II. Notably, support tends to be consistently high in the former East German states, with Saxony at the top. The former East and West Germanies had made history as different states from 1949 until 1990. The East and West thus have different values and minds, which lead to divergent support for AfD.

¹ Michal Kubát and Martin Mejstřík, eds., *Populist Parties in Contemporary Europe* (demos, June 2020), 8. <https://openarchive.tk.mta.hu/id/eprint/424>.

² German political parties must win at least 5% of the vote to gain a seat in the Bundestag. The more parties there are in parliament, the more difficult it is for members of parliament to build a consensus and make decisions. This would cause difficulties in forming a stable government. That is why the Five-Percent Hurdle limits small parties in the Bundestag. In 2013, AfD won 4.7% of the vote.

Der Bundeswahlleiter, “Endgültiges amtliches Ergebnis der Bundestagswahl 2013,” *Pressemitteilung* no. 34/2013 (October 9, 2013), <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/info/presse/mitteilungen/bundestagswahl-2013/2013-10-09-endgueltiges-amtliches-ergebnis-der-bundestagswahl-2013.html>. Wolfram Hilpert, *einfach POLITIK: Lexikon* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2022), 96–7. <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/lexikon-in-einfacher-sprache/292100/fuenf-prozent-huerde/>.

³ Der Bundeswahlleiter, “Bundestagswahl 2017: Endgültiges Ergebnis,” *Pressemitteilung* no. 34/17 (October 12, 2017), https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/info/presse/mitteilungen/bundestagswahl-2017/34_17_endgueltiges_ergebnis.html.

⁴ European Parliament, “Germany – Breakdown by national parties and political groups: 2019-2024,” <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/tools/widget-country/germany/2019-2024/>.

In the most recent 2021 Bundestag election, AfD lost seats but still managed to win 83 seats with 10.3% of the vote, becoming the fifth-largest party.⁵ The trend of AfD support in the eastern region was also evident in 2021, with several eastern constituencies receiving more than 30 % of the vote.⁶ What kind of election campaign did AfD run this time? The 2021 campaign slogan was “Deutschland. Aber normal. (Germany. But normal.)”. Under this slogan, the party launched its election campaign through several means, involving print materials, social media content (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube), and street speeches. A part of the slogan “normal” is a very ambiguous and abstract term that different people perceive differently. The philosopher Peter Alexander mentions, “[n]ormality is what the conservative hopes to return to and the progressive hopes to establish.”⁷ Based on his words, I can hypothesise that what the conservative AfD told voters in the 2021 election was a return to the “normal” Germany of the past. To be received as normal, a certain number of voters must share the concept. What strategically and concretely AfD indicated as “normal” would be uncovered by analysing its campaign tools since they reflect the ideologies of political parties. Among the numerous campaign tools, election posters are worth analysing due to their reachability to the broadest public. A survey by the University of Hohenheim revealed that 62% of the respondents got information about the 2021 Bundestag election from the election posters (Figure 1). This is the highest percentage of other media: TV is 50%, and social media is 28%.⁸

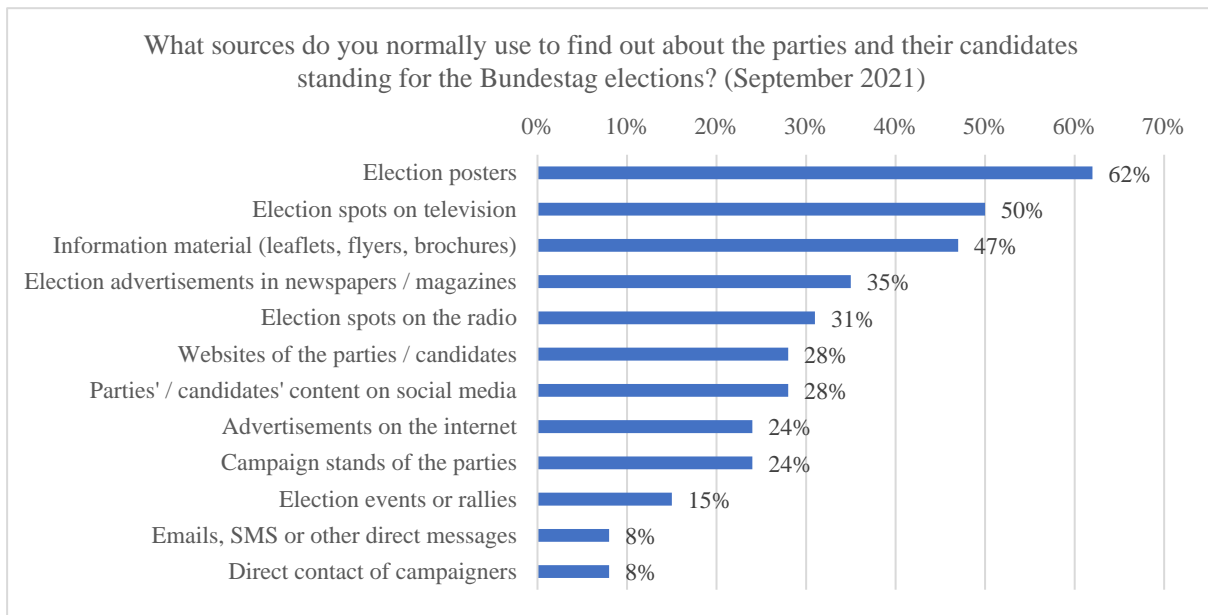
⁵ Der Bundeswahlleiter, “Bundestagswahl 2021: Endgültiges Ergebnis,” *Pressemitteilung* no. 52/21 (October 15, 2021), https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/info/presse/mitteilungen/bundestagswahl-2021/52_21_endgueltiges-ergebnis.html.

⁶ Christoph Hasselbach, “Die Bundestagswahl in Zahlen: Ein geteiltes Land,” *Deutsche Welle*, September 28, 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/40ydv>.

⁷ Peter Alexander, “Normality,” *Philosophy* 48, no. 184 (1973): 137, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100060605>.

⁸ Statista, “Über welche Informationsquellen erfahren Sie normalerweise etwas über die bei der Bundestagswahl antretenden Parteien und deren Kandidaten?” September 2021, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1259326/umfrage/wahlkampfkanale-zur-bundestagswahl/> (accessed January 22, 2022).

Figure 1. Survey on communication means during the 2021 Bundestag election campaign⁹



This thesis, therefore, multimodally analyses populist discourses of AfD from its election posters in 2021. The research question is as follows: *What strategies can be read from AfD's election posters in 2021 within the historical and socio-political context of Germany?* Multimodal discourse analysis [MDA] was used to examine 19 election posters of AfD for the 2021 Bundestag election, which are issue-oriented and contain photos. The novelty of this thesis is that there are still few studies on the 2021 election posters of AfD. This thesis additionally attempts to fill a research gap in that little visual analysis has been conducted in Populism Studies. Analysing populism from a rhetorical perspective alone is not sufficient to grasp its complete picture.¹⁰ This is because populists like AfD frequently use visual content to increase their supporters.

⁹ Statista. The panel survey was carried out by the University of Hohenheim in collaboration with the market and opinion research institute forsa. The survey conducted in Germany between September 2 and 10, 2021, with multiple-choice responses from voters aged 18 and over. The total number of respondents was 14,999. The original question was: "Über welche Informationsquellen erfahren Sie normalerweise etwas über die bei der Bundestagswahl antretenden Parteien und deren Kandidaten?"

¹⁰ Erik P. Bucy and Jungseock Joo, "Editors' Introduction: Visual Politics, Grand Collaborative Programs, and the Opportunity to Think Big," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 26, no. 1 (January 2021): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220970361>.

1.1 Outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. After this introduction, Chapter 2 first defines the polysemous term populism and categorises European populist parties. It is followed by a brief history of AfD, the result of the 2021 Bundestag election, and the East and West German differences. Chapter 3 reviews previous research on populist discourses, election campaigns, and AfD's election posters. Chapter 4 introduces the theoretical framework of this thesis by referring to four theories: multimodality, speech act and image act, framing, and discourse of illusion. Chapter 5 explains the method (MDA and sub-questions) and the data (posters for analysis and two kinds of comparators) I employed. Chapter 6 then presents and discusses the findings at each phase of the analytical framework. In the end, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis and gives the potential for future research.

2 Background

2.1 Definition of Populism

Since this thesis deals with one of the European populist parties, it is first necessary to define what populism is. “Populism is notoriously hard to grasp and has long been one of the most ‘contested’ concepts in the social sciences.”¹¹ While there are still various approaches to defining populism,¹² an ideational approach is the most dominant in Populism Studies.¹³ This approach sees populism essentially as a set of ideas. According to Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, populism is

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.¹⁴

Similarly, Jan-Werner Müller defines populism as

a particular moralistic imagination of politics, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified (...) people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior.¹⁵

Müller adds that the claim that they are the sole representatives of the people is what makes

¹¹ Kurt Weyland, “Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 67, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.2>.

¹² Besides the ideational approach, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* introduces a political-strategic approach and a socio-cultural approach. The political-strategic approach focuses on charismatic leaders, explaining that “populism revolves around the opportunism of personalistic plebiscitarian leaders.” The socio-cultural approach sees populism as performance and defines it as the flaunting of the “low”. The low means “cruder, personalistic, culturally ‘nativist,’ and overall ‘less sublimated’ way of being and doing politics.” Weyland, 67. Pierre Ostiguy, “Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.3>.

¹³ Cas Mudde, “Populism: An Ideational Approach,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.1>.

¹⁴ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

¹⁵ Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 19–20.

them populists. Populists see their political opponents as the corrupt elite and even claim that non-supporters are not part of the proper people.¹⁶ To sum up their definitions, populism is based on the dualism of the pure people and the corrupt elite, and furthermore on the assumption that the people have a single general will.¹⁷

Moreover, Mudde and Kaltwasser call populism the thin-centred ideology since it inevitably attaches to other ideologies.¹⁸ Left-wing populism is a combination of populism and socialist ideas, whereas right-wing populism is a combination of populism and nationalist ideas.¹⁹ Populism can thus transform itself into anything like a chameleon, but it has two apparent enemies: elitism and pluralism.²⁰ Firstly, populism is anti-elitist in portraying the elite as corrupt in contrast with the morally pure people. Secondly, dualistic populism is the opposite idea of pluralism that politics should reflect the interests and values of as many people as possible.

2.2 Populist Parties in Europe

Another common feature among European populist parties is that they are more or less Eurosceptic, i.e. against the supranational EU's empowerment.²¹ For populist parties of an anti-elitist and anti-pluralist nature, the elite-driven project of the EU with multiculturalism is a common enemy. European integration is a technocratic project that initially began reflecting the totalitarian past.²² Technocracy means the management and administration of policies by impartial and selfless elite experts with specialist technical knowledge. Jean Monnet and the

¹⁶ Müller, 20.

¹⁷ Müller's definition of populism resembles to that of Mudde and Kaltwasser. Nonetheless, unlike Mudde and Kaltwasser, who mention populism can positively or negatively affect democracy, Müller emphasises that populism damages democracy by undermining political rights. As it is another grand theme separate from the topic of this thesis, it does not go deeper into the implications of populism for liberal democracy.

¹⁸ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 6.

¹⁹ Mudde and Kaltwasser, 21.

²⁰ Mudde and Kaltwasser, 7–8. Müller, *What Is Populism?* 20.

²¹ Mudde and Kaltwasser, 22. There used to be some European populist parties declaring their intention to leave the EU, as in the case of Brexit, but such argument is now declining.

²² Müller, *What Is Populism?* 93–9.

other architects of the post-war European order viewed popular sovereignty as risky because fascists like Adolf Hitler were legitimately in power under the parliamentary democracy and then abused power.²³ In the guise of increasing democracy, postwar European politics thus conducted the division of political authority and the empowerment of unelected institutions such as constitutional courts.²⁴ “European integration (...) added supranational constraints to national ones.”²⁵ The integration starting in the economic policy sphere gradually spilt over into the political sphere.

The deeper European integration has gone, the more people have criticised the constrained democratic nature of European integration as a democracy deficit. It led to the rise of various populist parties seeking to reduce the EU’s competence and regain their own sovereignty. Here, European populist parties are divided into five categories based on the ideological approach. Firstly, *radical right-wing populist parties* like FN/RN and AfD combine populism with authoritarianism and nativism. These parties value law and order, try to defend only the interests of the native group members, and tend to demonise outsiders like immigrants as a threat to the nation-state.²⁶ The German historian Volker Weiß explains that the radical right-wing populists like AfD recognise Muslim migrants and refugees as a “real enemy”. The spell to drive it away brings a powerful attraction. Nevertheless, the real enemy is not an “absolute enemy” that is out of control. The “absolute enemy” is liberalism.²⁷ The British conservative journalist Douglas Murray laments that liberal political elites, including the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, continue to bring large numbers of migrants into Europe.²⁸ As a result, Murray states, “Europe is committing suicide.”²⁹

²³ Müller, 93–9.

²⁴ Müller, 94–5.

²⁵ Müller, 95.

²⁶ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 34. Kubát and Mejstřík, *Populist Parties*, 13–20.

²⁷ Volker Weiß, *Doitsu no Shin-uyoku* [Die autoritäre Revolte], trans. Haruo Hasegawa (Tokyo: SHINSENSHA Co.,Ltd., 2019), 314–22.

²⁸ Douglas Murray, *Seiyō no jishi* [The Strange Death of Europe], trans. Atsuo Machida (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Inc., 2018).

²⁹ Murray, 1.

Secondly, *neoliberal populist parties*, including the Forza Italia [FI] and the United Kingdom Independence Party [UKIP], resemble the first group. However, these parties are additionally characterised by neoliberal policies such as lower taxes and free trade.³⁰ The third is *illiberal populist parties* in post-communist countries. The Hungarian Civic Alliance [FIDESZ] and the Polish Law and Justice [PiS] are examples that reject the liberal democratic political system introduced by post-communist elites.³¹ The fourth is *anti-establishment populist parties* that are ideologically “hollowed out”. The Czech ANO 2011 is involved in this group. This group combines populism with the fight against corruption instead of “thick” ideologies.³² All four above groups are broadly right-wing, but the fifth is *radical left-wing populist parties* such as the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left [SYRIZA] and the Spanish Podemos. They are Eurosceptic for social reasons, opposing the austerity measures by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.³³

2.3 A Brief History of AfD

Although AfD today holds radical right-wing populist characteristics, it had a very different ideology when it was founded. At its establishment in 2013, AfD was an anti-euro party. The direct reason for its emergence was the European debt crisis starting in 2010. The party was formed by forces dissatisfied with the former Merkel Government’s rescue package for Greece and other Eurozone countries. The most crucial founding figure Bernd Lucke, an economics professor at the University of Hamburg, developed a moderate ideological profile that combined liberal market economy positions with conservative socio-political positions.³⁴ That

³⁰ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 35.

³¹ Kubát and Mejstřík, *Populist Parties*, 13–20.

³² Kubát and Mejstřík, 13–20. Ben Stanley, “Populism in Central and Eastern Europe,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.6>.

This group might be more accurately captured by the political-strategic approach: “populism revolves around the opportunism of personalistic plebiscitarian leaders.” Weyland, “Populism,” 67.

³³ Kubát and Mejstřík, 13–20. Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 37.

³⁴ Frank Decker, “Kurz und bündig: Die AfD,” *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/parteien/parteien-in-deutschland/afd/211108/kurz-und-buendig-die-afd/>. Ralf

economic liberal party, largely focusing on the euro issue, received just short of 5% of the vote (4.7%) in 2013 and did not enter the Bundestag.³⁵ However, in the EP election held in 2014, AfD succeeded in winning seven seats and joined the right-wing European Conservatives and Reformists.³⁶

AfD then gradually moved to the right and became polarised. Björn Höcke was the most influential and controversial figure in the party's radicalisation and rightward shift with his historical revisionist and nationalist remarks.³⁷ Höcke attempted to mobilise the national conservatives against the economic liberals.³⁸ This Höcke's action later led to the decisive event in AfD's transformation into a radical right-wing populist party, namely Lucke's leaving the party. Shortly before his leaving, at the party congress in Essen in July 2015, Lucke lost his leadership in a defeat to Frauke Petry, who possessed national conservative ideas.³⁹ Some economic liberal members followed Lucke, leaving the party. Under Petry, a shift in strategy toward an extreme anti-immigration and anti-Islam stance during the refugee and migrant crisis starting in 2015 allowed AfD to enter the Bundestag for the first time in 2017. AfD did not merely win seats but quickly grew to become the third-largest party in the Bundestag, in other words, the first opposition party.⁴⁰ In 2019, AfD also gained 11 seats in the EP and joined the radical right-wing Identity and Democracy Group.⁴¹

Despite the historic victory of the far-right in 2017, AfD's internal disputes did not cease. Not long after the 2017 Bundestag election, Petry resigned and left the party. Jörg Meuthen and Alexander Gauland then took over the leadership.⁴² Petry's leaving resulted from a conflict

Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany: AfD, Pegida, and the Identitarian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 37.

³⁵ Der Bundeswahlleiter, "Endgültiges amtliches Ergebnis."

³⁶ European Parliament, "Germany – Breakdown by national parties and political groups: 2014-2019," <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/tools/widget-country/germany/2014-2019/outgoing-parliament/>.

³⁷ Havertz, *Radical Right Populism*, 40.

³⁸ Havertz, 40.

³⁹ Havertz, 39. Decker, "Kurz und bündig."

⁴⁰ Der Bundeswahlleiter, "Bundestagswahl 2017."

⁴¹ European Parliament, "Germany: 2019-2024."

⁴² Decker, "Kurz und bündig."

between Petry, who wanted Höcke to leave the party, and Gauland, who opposed it.⁴³ Höcke was an avid supporter of the anti-Islam movement Pegida and was so far-right that the party had already taken a strategic distance from him.⁴⁴ He was also a founding member of the informal nationalist far-right group *Der Flügel* within AfD.⁴⁵ Höcke's remaining and Petry's leaving the party moved AfD even further to the right. Ralf Havertz, an associate professor of International Relations at Keimyung University, notes as follows:

The development of the political positions of AfD since its foundation can be described as a permanent movement to the right. With each internal conflict among the leadership of the party AfD moved further to the right "from Lucke to Petry to Gauland".⁴⁶

There are claims that peace in German society is threatened by far-right terrorists inspired by these far-right AfD members.⁴⁷ *Der Flügel* was eventually dissolved in the spring of 2020 after being recognised as a right-wing extremist group by the German domestic intelligence services, i.e. the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz.⁴⁸ Such social recognition from influential external organisations might halt the AfD's shift to the extreme right.

AfD has appointed multiple leaders simultaneously since its foundation in order to reflect the opinions of different wings within the party. At the time of the 2021 Bundestag election, Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla took the leadership. In addition, together with Chrupalla, Alice Weidel played the role of one of AfD's leading candidates. Although Meuthen left the party in January 2022, Chrupalla currently serves as a party chairperson and Weidel as a floor leader in the Bundestag.⁴⁹

⁴³ Decker. Havertz, *Radical Right Populism*, 45–6.

⁴⁴ Havertz, 40.

⁴⁵ Havertz, 46–8.

⁴⁶ Havertz, 50.

⁴⁷ Havertz, 47.

⁴⁸ Havertz, 46–8. Frank Decker, "Die Organisation der AfD," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/parteien/parteien-in-deutschland/afd/273133/die-organisation-der-afd/>.

⁴⁹ *Deutsche Welle*, "Germany: AfD co-chair Jörg Meuthen quits party, says it's lurched too far right," January 28, 2022, <https://p.dw.com/p/46E6M>.

2.4 Bundestag Election in 2021

The Bundestag election on September 26, 2021, was crucial for choosing a successor to the former Chancellor Merkel, who had been chancellor for 16 years. Overall, the main issues in 2021 were social security (28%), environment and climate (22%), economy and employment (22%), and COVID-19 (7%), according to *Deutsche Welle*. However, which issues were more influential to voters' decisions depended on voters' party preferences. Many CDU/CSU and FDP voters were concerned with economic issues (43% and 34% respectively), SPD and LINKE voters with social security (44% and 39% respectively), and 82% of GRÜNE voters with environmental issues.⁵⁰ This survey indicates that immigration issues were less important in 2021, while the overwhelming majority of voters focused on it in 2017.⁵¹ Only AfD voters continued to prioritise immigration issues in 2021 (40%).⁵²

As a result of the election, eight parties entered the Bundestag. The parties and their number of votes are as follows: SPD (25.7%), CDU (18.9%), GRÜNE (14.8%), FDP (11.5%), AfD (10.3%), CSU⁵³ (5.2%), LINKE (4.9%) and SSW (0.1%).⁵⁴ Table 1 shows their respective official names, political positions, ideologies and the number of seats. Figure 2 indicates the change in the vote share received by the first seven parties from 2009 to 2021. The centre-left SPD and GRÜNE increased their seats significantly, whereas the centre-right CDU/CSU decreased. AfD also lost seats, going from the third-largest party to the fifth one. In December 2021, SPD, GRÜNE, and FDP ultimately formed the so-called “traffic light” coalition, and Olaf Scholz of SPD was appointed the new chancellor.

⁵⁰ Hasselbach, “Die Bundestagswahl.”

⁵¹ André Pätzold, Julius Tröger, David Wendler, and Christopher Möller, “Das sind die 15 wichtigsten politischen Probleme in Deutschland,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, September 18, 2017, <https://interaktiv.morgenpost.de/probleme-bundestagswahl-2017/>.

⁵² Hasselbach, “Die Bundestagswahl.”

⁵³ CSU is a CDU's sister party in Bavaria.

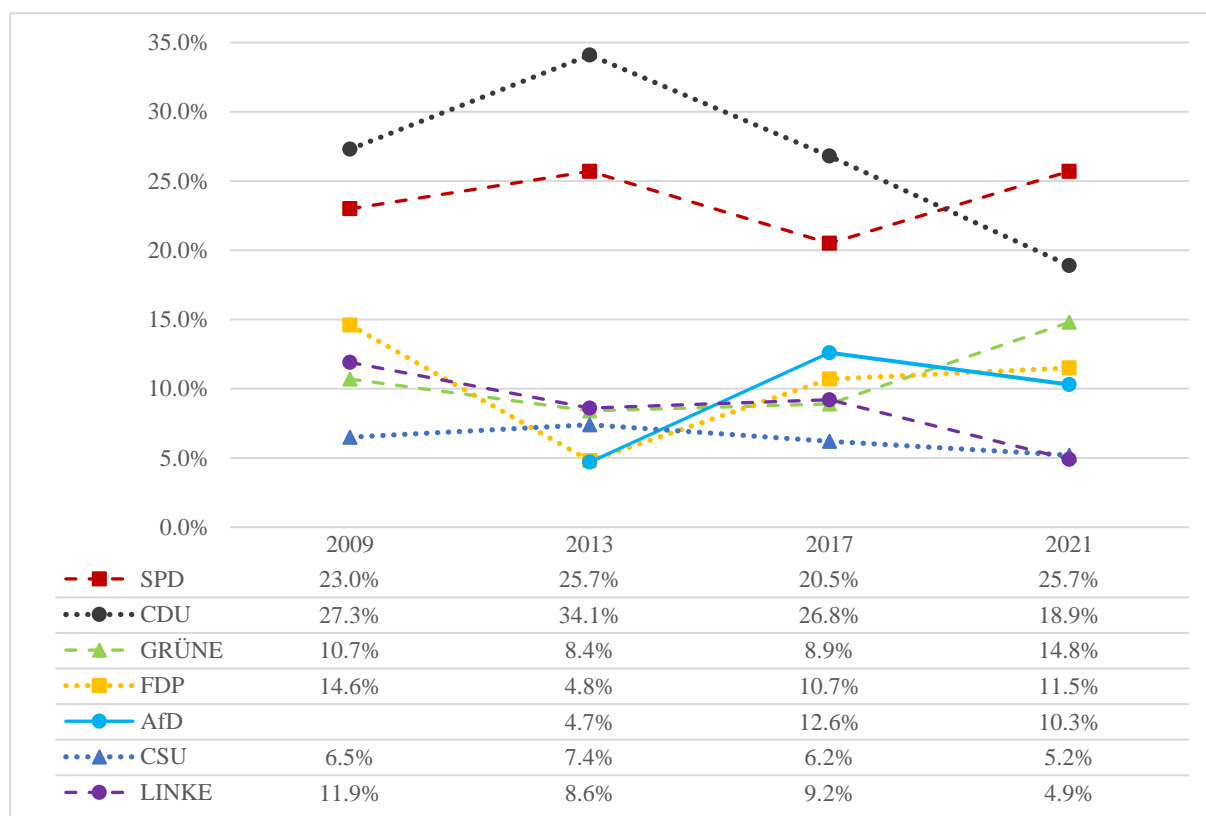
⁵⁴ Although the Five-Percent Hurdle prevents parties under 5% of the votes from joining the Bundestag, a special clause called Grundmandatsklausel allowed LINKE to join. Additionally, the Five-Percent Hurdle did not apply to SSW because it is a minority party.

Tagesschau, “Warum die Linke doch im Bundestag bleibt,” September 27, 2021, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/bundestagswahl/bundestagswahl-linke-ssw-101.html> (accessed April 26, 2022).

Table 1. Political parties in the 2021 Bundestag⁵⁵

Party name	Abbr.	Position	Ideology	Seats
Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	SPD	Centre-left	Social democracy	206
Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	CDU	Centre-right	Liberal conservatism, Christian democracy	152
BÜNDNIS 90 / DIE GRÜNEN	GRÜNE	Centre-left	Green politics	118
Freie Demokratische Partei	FDP	Centre-right	Liberalism	92
Alternative für Deutschland	AfD	Right	Right-wing populism, National conservatism	83
Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern e.V.	CSU	Centre-right	Regionalism, Christian democracy, Conservatism	45
DIE LINKE	LINKE	Left	Left-wing populism, Democratic socialism	39
Südschleswigscher Wählerverband	SSW	Centre	Minority politics (Danish and Frisian)	1

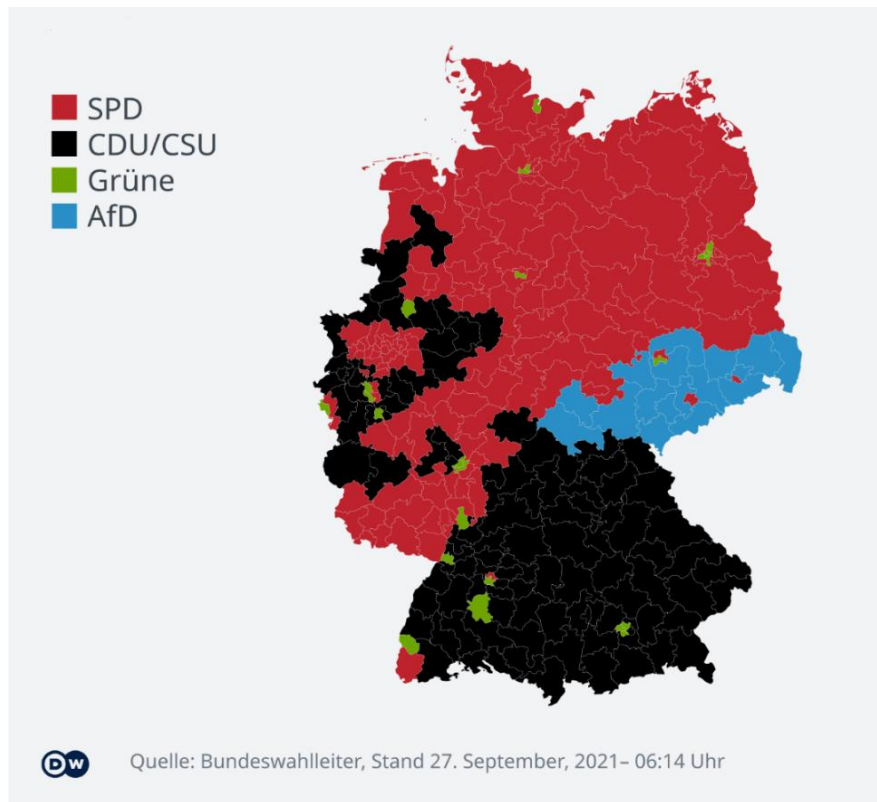
Figure 2. The vote share of the seven parties in the Bundestag elections, from 2009 to 2021⁵⁶



⁵⁵ Der Bundeswahlleiter, “Bundestagswahl 2021.” Robert Vehrkamp, “Before the election: Majority of Germans reject populist views,” *Bertelsmann Foundation*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/topics/latest-news/2017/juli/before-the-election-majority-of-germans-reject-populist-views> (accessed April 27, 2022). Wolfram Nordsieck, “Germany,” *Parties and Elections in Europe*, <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/germany.html> (accessed April 27, 2022).

⁵⁶ Der Bundeswahlleiter, “Endgültiges amtliches Ergebnis.” Der Bundeswahlleiter, “Bundestagswahl 2017.” Der

Figure 3. Results map: Parties with the most second vote by constituency in 2021⁵⁷



Moreover, the map above shows which party had the most votes in each constituency. The trend of solid AfD support in the East German region was also evident in 2021. The light blue AfD dominated almost all of Saxony, the southern part of Thuringia and the southern tip of Saxony-Anhalt and received more than 30 % of the vote in several eastern constituencies. In contrast, the proportion of those who voted for AfD remained in single figures in many western constituencies.⁵⁸ The divergence in support for AfD between East and West can be attributed to the historical event of Germany's division into East and West from 1949 to 1990.

Bundeswahlleiter, "Bundestagswahl 2021." As AfD is a party founded in 2013, there is no data for 2009.

⁵⁷ Hasselbach, "Die Bundestagswahl." The first vote (candidate vote) allows voters to vote for candidates in their constituency. This ensures that members of Bundestag are elected from all constituencies. The second vote (party vote) is where voters cast their votes for political parties. This determines the distribution of the number of Bundestag seats for each party.

⁵⁸ Hasselbach.

2.5 The East and West Germanies

After World War II, Germany was divided and ruled by four countries: the US, the UK, France and the USSR. Due to the Cold War, two Germanies were subsequently created in 1949: the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG, or West Germany] and the German Democratic Republic [GDR, or East Germany]. Until the 1990 German reunification, the former East and West Germanies had made history as different states and shared different values. Over three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which divided East and West, the differences between East and West remain. Three examples are introduced below.

The first difference is that East Germans are more xenophobic than West Germans.⁵⁹ East Germans tend to resist the influx of foreigners more strongly because East regions have fewer foreigners except for the capital Berlin. In contrast, West Germans have more opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships with foreign neighbours. Maria Pesthy et al. discovered that East Germans showed higher levels of populism and nativism than West Germans. In particular, East Germans older than 50, who came of age before the reunification, had the highest levels.⁶⁰

Economic disparities also persist. According to *Deutsche Welle*, the average disposable income of East Germans was roughly 86% of that of West Germans in 2021 despite gradual convergence.⁶¹ Christian Hirte (CDU), the former commissioner of eastern German affairs, reported in 2019 that more than half of East Germans felt as if they were second-class citizens. Structural issues, such as the concentration of business districts in the former West German regions, also contribute to this difference. Hirte emphasised that no headquarter of the DAX 30 company was located in the East region at all.⁶²

⁵⁹ For convenience, people living in the area of the former East Germany are referred to as East Germans and people living in the former West Germany as West Germans.

⁶⁰ Maria Pesthy et al., "Why Is the AfD so Successful in Eastern Germany? An Analysis of the Ideational Foundations of the AfD Vote in the 2017 Federal Election," *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 62 (2021): 69–91, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-020-00285-9>.

⁶¹ *Deutsche Welle*, "German unity: Eastern states still lag economically, but catching up, report says," July 7, 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3w9D3>.

⁶² *Deutsche Welle*, "Former East Germany still lags behind west," September 25, 2019, <https://p.dw.com/p/3QF0e>.

Thirdly, Ivan Kalmar and Nitzan Shoshan point out a difference in the historical perception of World War II: West Germany and East Germany

each took a very different approach to mastering the terrible heritage of the Nazi past. In the GDR, National Socialism was described as fascism, and its defeat by the Soviet Union as liberating the German people, who had been the Nazis' victims. East Germany did not consider itself to be the legal or moral heir of the Hitler regime. West Germany did.⁶³

Merkel and other liberal politicians have used the narrative of "historical guilt". It is guilt for the imperialism of the past, which was necessary for West Germany to rejoin the international community in the post-war era. The historical guilt story would be less likely to resonate with East Germans, who do not share the same historical narratives as West Germans. The east-west regions still hold such differences, which should be linked to the AfD's overwhelming support in the former East German regions.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ivan Kalmar and Nitzan Shoshan, "Islamophobia in Germany, East/West: an introduction," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 28, no.1 (2020): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2020.1727867>.

⁶⁴ It should not be forgotten that the German left-wing populist party LINKE is also popular in the former East German regions. While support for the LINKE is lower than for AfD, the vote share distribution is very similar. Although this thesis does not deal much with LINKE, I keep in mind that the rise of AfD is not the only political phenomenon that symbolises the former East Germany. Kalmar and Shoshan, 5. Antonio Voce and Seán Clarke, "German election 2021: full results and analysis," *The Guardian*, September 27, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2021/sep/26/german-election-results-exit-poll-and-possible-coalitions>.

3 Literature Review

Before analysing AfD's populist discourses from its election posters in 2021, this chapter reviews previous studies on populist discourse, election campaigns, and AfD's election posters.

3.1 Populist Discourse and Crisis

All kinds of populists involving AfD are typically seen as benefiting from crises. They have gained power by simplifying complex issues and proposing clear and popular solutions. The political theorist Ernesto Laclau argues that “populism simply cannot emerge without a political crisis, which is considered a ‘necessary precondition for populism’.”⁶⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, AfD emerged in the wake of the European debt crisis. Besides, during the refugee and migrant crisis, AfD and other European radical right-wing populists dramatically gained support by frequently exploiting othering narratives. They demonised refugees and migrants, especially Muslims, as terrorists or those who abused the welfare system, calling for their exclusion.

In the case of the coronavirus pandemic, or the COVID-19 crisis, this general pattern did not function. According to researchers at the University of Cambridge, support for populist political parties of all kinds fell globally during the 2020-21 pandemic.⁶⁶ Although previous crises have been external crises (e.g. financial, political, and migrant crises),⁶⁷ the enemy of the COVID-19 crisis is a virus spreading from within. Johannes Hillje, an expert on AfD's rhetorical tactics, mentions in this COVID-19 crisis, “[t]he default populist narrative – us versus them, insiders versus outsiders – doesn't work anymore.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Giuliano Bobba and Nicolas Hubé, eds., *Populism and the Politicization of the COVID-19 Crisis in Europe* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 4.

⁶⁶ Roberto S. Foa et al., *The Great Reset: Public Opinion, Populism, and the Pandemic* (Cambridge: Centre for the Future of Democracy, 2022), 2.

⁶⁷ Bobba and Hubé, *Populism*, 131–44.

⁶⁸ Emily Schultheis, “The Coronavirus Has Paralyzed Europe's Far-Right,” *Foreign Policy*, April 14, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/14/coronavirus-has-paralyzed-europes-far-right/> (accessed February 10, 2022).

Besides, Oliver W. Lembcke gives two reasons why AfD could not benefit from the COVID-19 crisis. Firstly, because of the much more extreme stance of the extra-parliamentary opposition towards coronavirus, AfD was not as present as it used to be. Resistance to the government took place outside of parliament in the form of corona parties and demonstrations, whose participants mostly denied the existence of coronaviruses. On the other hand, AfD just condemned policies within the government's narrative. Lembcke mentions that "[i]t is no longer focused on the right measures to protect the population during the crisis, but on the 'Corona measures crisis', or simply on the 'lockdown crisis'."⁶⁹ Secondly, AfD could not attract media attention because the federal and state governments' disputes were spotlighted.⁷⁰ Emily Schultheis also points out the shift in voters' attention to technocrats like government officials and experts. AfD has lost the spotlight on which it has long relied.⁷¹ AfD will possibly link the detrimental economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis to outsiders again and benefit from the crisis in the future; however, the studies mentioned above show that AfD could not exploit the COVID-19 crisis as a driving force at the time of the September 2021 election.

3.2 Populist Discourse and Visual

Darren G. Lilleker et al. insist that "[p]olitics has always had a visual dimension."⁷² Medieval kings visually used portraits and majestic buildings to represent their power and wealth. Hitler and Stalin used visual propaganda in their anti-Semitic policies.⁷³ Contemporary populists also make use of visual images as an essential instrument to mobilise the public. One of their rhetorical features is that they appeal to negative emotions such as anger, fear and anxiety.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Oliver W. Lembcke, *Populism and the Politicization of the COVID-19 Crisis in Europe*, ed. Giuliano Bobba and Nicolas Hubé (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 84.

⁷⁰ Lembcke, 73–86.

⁷¹ Schultheis, "The Coronavirus."

⁷² Darren G. Lilleker et al., "Introduction: Visual Political Communication," In *Visual Political Communication*, ed. Anastasia Veneti et al. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 5.

⁷³ Lilleker et al., 1–11.

⁷⁴ Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, *Emotions, Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 3.

Lilleker et al. argue that visual images effectively appeal to these emotions, triggering a strong emotional reaction.⁷⁵ Andrew S. Ross and Aditi Bhatia, who analysed the UKIP's Brexit campaign posters, insist that visual is almost always used by radical right-wing populists' posters to "create a strong impact, and they are especially effective at giving voters a vivid impression of an alternative reality that may materialise in the near future, presented as desirable or, in most cases, deplorable."⁷⁶ Rens Vliegthart, who analysed six decades of Dutch election posters, emphasises the impact of the visual elements in political communication and states that analysis of them provides further insight into the purely textual analysis.⁷⁷

Table 2 shows examples of past posters appealing to negative emotions created by three European radical right-wing populist parties: the Swiss People's Party [SVP], the Freedom Party in Austria [FPÖ], and AfD. Jonas Glatthard at *swissinfo.ch* reported that an SVP's poster in 2009 attracted international attention. Many populist parties like FPÖ and AfD mimicked the SVP's anti-Islam image.⁷⁸ Headscarves, mosques and minarets were depicted as symbols of Islam, and hostility was directed toward them. Todd H. Green, an expert on Islamophobia in Europe and the US, says that wearing headscarves in public is deemed to violate *laïcité* (secularism), and building mosques or minarets is feared as Islamisation of public space.⁷⁹ Visually using these items, these populists lament the Islamisation of Europe and portray Muslims as a threat. They then advance the discourse that eliminating Muslims or migrants in general is necessary to protect their traditional cultures.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Lilleker et al., "Introduction," 1–11.

⁷⁶ Andrew S. Ross and Aditi Bhatia, "'Ruled Britannia': Metaphorical Construction of the EU as Enemy in UKIP Campaign Posters," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 26, no. 1 (January 2021): 191, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220935812>.

⁷⁷ Rens Vliegthart, "The Professionalization of Political Communication? A Longitudinal Analysis of Dutch Election Campaign Posters," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 2 (February 2012): 147, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211419488>.

⁷⁸ Jonas Glatthard, "100 years of Swiss political posters in colour," *swissinfo.ch*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/100-years-of-swiss-political-posters-in-colour/46242848> (accessed May 16, 2022).

⁷⁹ Todd H. Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 306–26. Islamophobia means hostility toward Muslims and Islam that results in discrimination and violence.

⁸⁰ Ross and Bhatia, "Ruled Britannia," 191.

Table 2. Anti-Islam posters produced by SVP, FPÖ, and AfD⁸¹

SVP poster in 2009	FPÖ poster in 2014	AfD poster in 2017
		

3.3 Campaign Tools in Germany

Christina Holtz-Bacha and Eva-Maria Lessinger argue that of all campaign tools, the oldest tool of election posters still attracts the most attention even in this digital age in Germany.⁸² As mentioned in the introduction, the study by the University of Hohenheim discovered that 62% of the respondents used posters to get information about the 2021 Bundestag election, with 50% using TV and 28% using social media.⁸³ Holtz-Bacha and Lessinger emphasise that no campaign tool achieves such a broad reach as posters.⁸⁴ During the six weeks before the election day, posters are plastered all over the streets of Germany, and no one can avoid them. For German political parties, election posters displayed in public spaces are “the best instrument to make themselves known to the public.”⁸⁵ The role of posters as a mass medium targeting a wide range of the public is thus to inform, mobilise, and convince voters.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Glatthard, “100 years.” Nik Martin, “German far-right AfD politician resigns after converting to Islam,” *Deutsche Welle*, January 24, 2018, <https://p.dw.com/p/2rP6X>.

⁸² Christina Holtz-Bacha and Eva-Maria Lessinger, “Indispensable and Very Much Alive: Posters in German Election Campaigns,” In *Election Posters Around the Globe: Political Campaigning in the Public Space*, ed. Christina Holtz-Bacha and Bengt Johansson (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 159–60.

⁸³ Statista, “Über welche Informationsquellen.”

⁸⁴ Statista. Holtz-Bacha and Lessinger, “Indispensable,” 159–60. Stefan Dege, “Election posters in Germany: Underrated eye-catchers,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 11, 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3ymgv>.

⁸⁵ Holtz-Bacha and Lessinger, 159–60.

⁸⁶ Dennis Steffan and Niklas Venema, “New medium, old strategies? Comparing online and traditional campaign posters for German Bundestag elections, 2013–2017,” *European Journal of Communication* 35, no. 4 (2020): 372–5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323120903681>.

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube), which gradually began to be used as campaign tools in the late 2000s, have both similarities and differences with election posters. Below, still image posts except for videos are compared with posters. One resemblance is that both are composed of visual and textual elements. In addition, social media posts are also spread, especially six weeks before election day.⁸⁷ On the other hand, social media helps reach specific target groups, unlike posters. The role of social media posts is thus to strengthen the tie between campaigners and their supporters.⁸⁸

Dennis Steffan and Niklas Venema, who compared online posts and offline posters in the 2013 and 2017 Bundestag elections, found that social media posts tended to be more harmful than posters in public spaces due to their limited audience.⁸⁹ Due to platform algorithms, social media users are unconsciously trapped in a filter bubble. Teo Keipi et al. argue that people with radical ideas can be connected with like-minded people in the bubble, making their thoughts more extreme.⁹⁰

Furthermore, in the case of social media, radical posts can survive only to be blocked by some users, as long as they do not contravene the law. On the contrary, election posters can be destroyed or removed by viewers. If this happens, they will no longer function as posters. *Der Tagesspiegel* reports that almost half of all 33,000 small-sized street posters of AfD were stolen or destroyed during the 2017 Bundestag election campaign. The 141 large posters were destroyed on average 2.8 times each, bringing the total number of destroyed posters to 400.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Steffan and Venema, 372.

⁸⁸ Steffan and Venema, 384.

⁸⁹ Steffan and Venema, 370–88.

⁹⁰ Teo Keipi, Matti Näsi, Atte Oksanen, and Pekka Räsänen, *Online Hate and Harmful Content: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York : Routledge, 2017), 13–4.

⁹¹ Robert Kiesel, “Berliner AfD setzt Preisgeld für Hinweise aus,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, March 6, 2019, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/zerstoerte-wahlplakate-berliner-afd-setzt-preisgeld-fuer-hinweise-aus/24068400.html> (accessed April 7, 2022).

3.4 AfD's Election Poster

Studies on 2021 election posters are still scarce, but several studies exist on the subject of 2017 posters, which concentrated on immigration issues. Holtz-Bacha found two strategies in the AfD's 2017 posters. Firstly, AfD frequently used othering narratives by juxtaposing items related to Muslims and Germans – for instance, burqa and bikini (Poster a on Table 8) as well as Islam and pig (Poster h). Secondly, AfD linked refugees with fear both visually and verbally.⁹² One example is a poster depicting a group of refugees in black shadows that specifies: “‘In distress?’ More like the next crime wave! 52% increase in immigrant crime in 2017” (Poster j).⁹³

Nicole Doerr, who notes gender stereotypes in the 2017 posters, says that AfD created more obviously anti-Islam posters by combining gendered images and ethnonationalist rhetoric.⁹⁴ Doerr assesses Poster a as follows:

By associating “Islam” with “burka” (restriction) and “Western” with “bikini” (freedom), the poster opposes two simplistic and stereotypical images while hiding its implied messages (1) that women should not wear burkas, and (2) that Islam and women's liberation are irreconcilable.⁹⁵

According to Masanori Naito, headscarves tend to be recognised as a symbol of female oppression, a symbol of Islamic extremists, or a violation of secularism in Europe; however, these are just Western discourses. Many Muslim women wear headscarves of their own will. Also, connecting headscarves with extremists is prejudice. Seeing headscarves as a religious symbol and excluding them makes it impossible to live in harmony with Muslims.⁹⁶

⁹² Christina Holtz-Bacha ed., *Die (Massen-)Medien im Wahlkampf* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019), 14.

⁹³ The original text in German is: „In Seenot?“ Eher die nächste Verbrechenswelle! 52% mehr Einwandererkriminalität in 2017.

⁹⁴ Nicole Doerr, “The Visual Politics of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): Anti-Islam, Ethno-Nationalism, and Gendered Images,” *Social Sciences* 10, no.1 (2021): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10010020>.

⁹⁵ Doerr, 10.

⁹⁶ Masanori Naito, *Islam kara Europe o Miru* [Looking at Europe from the Perspective of Islam] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, Publishers, 2020), 15–54. Green, *The Fear*, 306–15.

Michael A. Hansen also asserts that “[t]he overwhelming majority of campaign ads widely disseminated in the 2017 election contained (...) direct xenophobic messages.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, Hansen compared the 2017 and 2021 manifestos and posters by focusing on textual elements. Although AfD published a similar manifesto in 2021 as in 2017, Hansen found its pronounced shift towards a more moderate and broader thematic campaigning style. Concretely, he points out,

The issues that the AfD’s campaign posters touch on include a wide array of social topics such as freedom, crime, immigration, rural area issues, green energy, jobs, Covid-19, retirement, gender equality, and self-employment.⁹⁸

Hansen further argues that AfD took a less direct and combative approach by citing Poster 6 in Table 5, which shows a young woman with the following text:⁹⁹ “For what did my father come to Germany then? For German Leitkultur. Our country. Our values.” Indeed, these sentences seem to be more moderate than those in Poster j above and express the claim that AfD is not an anti-immigration party. Nevertheless, the impression that posters make on the viewer is created not only by the textual elements but also by other communication modes like the image.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, further multimodal analysis is needed to determine what makes the 2021 posters’ messages more moderate and what strategies can be read from those posters.

⁹⁷ Michael A. Hansen, “German federal election: Is the AfD broadening its appeal to voters?” *EUROPP*, September 21, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2021/09/21/german-federal-election-is-the-afd-broadening-its-appeal-to-voters/> (accessed April 11, 2022).

⁹⁸ Hansen.

⁹⁹ Hansen.

¹⁰⁰ Vliegthart, “The Professionalization.”

4 Theoretical Framework

Four theories contributed to this thesis, which asks the question: *What strategies can be read from AfD's election posters in 2021 within the historical and socio-political context of Germany?* They include multimodality, speech act and image act, framing, and discourse of illusion.

4.1 Multimodality

As election posters consist of multiple modes of communication, such as images and texts, the approach of analysis across them is necessary. The first thing to be introduced here is the concept of multimodality, which underlies MDA. Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen developed multimodality, inspired by early semiotics and linguistics. Early semiotics assume that each sign has a direct and straightforward meaning – for instance, the colour red means danger. However, the meaning of red is not always “danger” but can flexibly change depending on context. Kress and van Leeuwen aimed to analyse how individual communication modes combine with other multiple modes and what meaning they compose in context as a whole. Kress argues that each mode has its specific strengths and affects one another:

Each mode does a specific thing: image shows what takes too long to read, and writing names what would be difficult to show. Colour is used to highlight specific aspects of the overall message. Without that division of semiotic labour, the sign, quite simply, would not work. Writing names and image shows, while colour frames and highlights; each to maximum effect and benefit.¹⁰¹

The view of Kress and van Leeuwen is influenced by Hallidayan linguistics, specifically social semiotics.¹⁰² Unlike other linguists who focused on explaining grammar, Michael

¹⁰¹ Gunther Kress, *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1.

¹⁰² Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2021). David Machin and Per Ledin, *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 7–10.

Halliday viewed language not as fixed by grammar, but as fluid, with meaning changing according to context. People choose and use language in cultural, historical and social contexts to produce texts. Kress and van Leeuwen extended Halliday's theory of language as a system of choices (a monomodal approach) by proposing that visual images can also be a part of choices (a multimodal approach).¹⁰³ The multimodal approach provides an analytical angle on why individual modes were chosen, how they interact, and what meaning they create as a whole.

4.2 Speech Act and Image Act

The second theory is speech act and image act. Words often carry other meanings behind the meaning they represent. Speech act theory guides in analysing the meaning behind the words. This theory was proposed by the British philosopher John L. Austin. He assumed that people use language not only to state facts true and false but also to carry out some action. Austin first distinguished between two types of utterances: constative and performative. The former state facts, while the latter undertake an action.¹⁰⁴ However, Austin later stated distinguishing performative utterances from constative is not always easy.¹⁰⁵ For instance, a seem-to-be constative utterance "there is a glass of water there" can be performative if a computer is next to the glass, and the utterance is intended to alert the other person. Austin then developed three categories of speech acts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts.

The former refers to the acts of saying something, that is, the actual words uttered. The illocutionary acts represent what is done in saying something or, in other words, the force or intention behind the words. Finally, the perlocutionary acts imply what is done by saying something, that is, the effect of the illocution on the hearer.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Machin and Ledin, 1–16.

¹⁰⁴ Alicia Martínez-Flor and Esther Usó-Juan eds., *Speech Act Performance* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010), 6–9.

¹⁰⁵ J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 94.

¹⁰⁶ Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, *Speech Act*, 7.

Austin's theory focused on language but was later applied to the analysis of images as well. That is called the image act theory. The producer manipulates the image to undertake some action, and the manipulated image is recognised by the viewers and makes them take some action. Kress and van Leeuwen point out that the gaze and the gesture directed at the viewer constitute image acts as an example.¹⁰⁷

They [people in images] may smile, in which case the viewer is asked to enter into a relation of social affinity with them; they may stare coldly at the viewer, in which case the viewer is meant to feel awed or ill at ease; they may seductively pout at the viewer, in which case the viewer is asked to desire. The same applies to gestures. A hand can point at the viewer, in a visual 'Hey, you there, I mean you' invite the viewer to come closer, or hold the viewer at bay with a defensive gesture, as if to say 'stay away from me'.¹⁰⁸

What kind of speech and image acts are included in AfD posters? Capturing the meaning behind the verbal and non-verbal elements of communication shown on the posters is instrumental to deciphering the AfD's strategies.

4.3 Framing

The third is framing theory. Social issues can be seen differently depending on how they are framed. According to William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani,

A frame, by incorporating and condensing a set of "metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, moral appeals, and other symbolic devices," supplies a readily comprehensible basis suggesting both how to think about the issue at hand and how to justify what should be done about it.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 115–7.

¹⁰⁸ Kress and van Leeuwen, 117.

¹⁰⁹ Paul M. Sniderman and Sean M. Theriault, "CHAPTER 5: The Structure of Political Argument and the Logic of Issue Framing," In *Studies in Public Opinion: Attitudes, Nonattitudes, Measurement Error, and Change*, ed. Willem E. Saris and Paul M. Sniderman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 135, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691188386-007>.

Framing by politicians has a significant impact on shaping public opinion. The framing theory of public opinion suggests that many ordinary citizens lack the capacity to make political judgements. Citizens' interest in politics is intermittent and superficial because they are primarily interested in politics only during crises and other extraordinary situations. Therefore, their views are basically influenced by how politicians frame the issues.¹¹⁰

Paul M. Sniderman and Sean M. Theriault experimented with how citizens' opinions changed depending on how issues were framed. They asked randomly selected respondents whether or not they would allow groups with extreme political views to hold rallies in public. A majority agreed if the issue was framed by *free speech*; a majority disagreed if it was framed by *violent risk*.¹¹¹ These results show that citizens' political decisions are pretty changeable depending on how issues are framed. In the real world, politicians strive to frame issues in their favour to win public support. Sniderman and Theriault conclude that a war of frames by politicians does more than overwhelm, perplex and blind political judgements of the general public; it can be even a condition for them to exercise it.¹¹² Election posters are outputs that are the result of politicians framing issues. The framing theory brings a perspective to analyse how AfD strategically framed social issues in Germany.

4.4 Discourse of Illusion

Lastly, Bhatia's concept of the *discourse of illusion* is also consulted. This theory plays a role in multidimensionally analysing discourses of AfD that election posters convey. Bhatia says that people can only subjectively perceive what is actually happening, namely objective reality. Nevertheless, different groups in society try to persuade their audiences that their interpretation

¹¹⁰ Sniderman and Theriault, 133–65.

¹¹¹ Sniderman and Theriault, 151–5. Sniderman and Theriault divided respondents into two groups: individual freedom adherents (210 people) and law and order adherents (317 people). In the case of the violent risk frame, 53% of the former and 37% of the latter agreed with public rallies of extreme groups. With the free speech frame, 89% of the former and 81% of the latter agreed with them.

¹¹² Sniderman and Theriault, 158.

of reality is correct and objective.¹¹³ Moreover, Bhatia adds that subjective realities offered as authentic narratives by those with power in society, such as politicians, are ultimately naturalised into social consciousness once audiences accept them.¹¹⁴ Bhatia named discourses produced when a reality based on a particular subjective interpretation tries to acquire the status of “truth” as the discourse of illusion. For its closer investigation, Bhatia developed a three-dimensional theoretical framework:

- i. *Historicity* is an angle “to analyse how history is renegotiated in order to situate, and often justify, current and future events in relation to the past.”¹¹⁵
- ii. *Linguistic and semiotic action* focuses on metaphors to analyse how ideological thought processes are translated into linguistic and semiotic actions.¹¹⁶
- iii. *Social impact* examines othering elements to clarify “the segregation such discourse engenders and the impact of it on socio-political relations.”¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Aditi Bhatia, *Discursive Illusions in Public Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 17.

This point resembles the aforementioned framing theory’s idea of “competition over how issues should be framed”.

¹¹⁴ Christopher J. Jenks and Aditi Bhatia, “Infesting our country: discursive illusions in anti-immigration border talk,” *Language and Intercultural Communication* 20, no. 2 (2020): 84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2020.1722144>.

¹¹⁵ Bhatia, *Discursive Illusions*, 45–52.

¹¹⁶ Bhatia, 52–9.

¹¹⁷ Bhatia, 59–68.

5 Methodology

5.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

MDA is one of the most effective qualitative research methods for analysing election posters with multiple communication modes. MDA looks at how individual modes (e.g. text, typography, layout, colour, and images) work and how they interact to generate social semiotic meanings. Not focusing merely on one mode but analysing the interaction of multiple modes thus helps gain a more complex and nuanced perspective on the discourses of political parties reflected in election posters.¹¹⁸

I adapted Luc Pauwels' multimodal framework for analysing websites to a poster version. The arranged version consists of five phases, from a first impression survey to more in-depth discourse analysis.¹¹⁹ To finally answer the research question (*What strategies can be read from AfD's election posters in 2021 within the historical and socio-political context of Germany?*), I constructed sub-questions at each phase inspired by four theoretical frameworks introduced in the previous chapter: multimodality, speech act and image act, framing, and discourse of illusion (Table 3).

The main limitation of qualitative research methods, including MDA, is that some extent of the author's subjective interpretation is included in the research results. My supervisors, Prof. Dr Janny de Jong at the University of Groningen and Prof. Dr Martin Elbel at Palacký University Olomouc, helped with reviews to minimise subjectivity. In addition, as a non-native German speaker, I would most likely overlook some of the intentions and metaphors behind the posters. In order to minimise oversight, I asked for help from a peer student, Jodie van 't Hoff, who grew up in Germany and is studying AfD. It should be additionally noted that the research

¹¹⁸ Luc Pauwels, "Visual Methods for Political Communication Research: Modes and Affordances," In *Visual Political Communication*, ed. Anastasia Veneti et al. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 75–95. Ross and Bhatia, "Ruled Britannia," 191–2.

¹¹⁹ Pauwels, 80. The original version has six phases in total; however, the fifth phase, "Analysis of information organization and spatial priming strategies", was removed. It analyses features that election posters do not hold, such as hyperlinks on websites.

results presented in this thesis are only analysed from a limited number of selected data and do not address AfD’s discourse in general. MDA aims for a detailed understanding of the selected data, not generalising the results.




Table 3. Five analytical phases and sub-questions

Phase 1	First impressions and reactions - What first impressions did I have?
Phase 2	Salient features and topics - What is depicted? Which issue is it relevant to? - Does it contain any negativity or hostility?
Phase 3	Intra- and cross-modal analysis - What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used? Why do the creators choose individual modes? - What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?
Phase 4	Embedded point(s) of view or “voice” and implied audience(s) and purposes - Who is the target group? - How is the issue framed?
Phase 5	Contextual and discourse analysis - Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised? - Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean? - Othering: Who is “us” and who are “others”?

5.2 Data Collection

The research object of this thesis is AfD's election posters for the 2021 Bundestag election, a series of “*Deutschland. Aber normal.* (Germany. But normal.)”. The data were collected in September 2021 from AfD's official website.¹²⁰ The total number of AfD's street posters was 61. Concerning content, the posters focus either on candidates or issues. Concerning design, some include images, and others do not. Based on these characteristics, the posters can be divided into three categories: candidate posters, issue posters *without* images, and issue posters *with* images (Table 4). The numbers of each are 4, 38 and 19 pieces. The analysis deals with only the third category (Table 5) for two reasons. Firstly, posters with images are more influential than purely textual posters. Indeed, an eye-tracking analysis identified that posters with images were more likely to attract attention than those with text.¹²¹ Secondly, issue-oriented posters are more reflective of political ideologies than candidate ones. The third category is thus appropriate for multimodally analysing the AfD's ideological strategies.

Table 4. Examples of three kinds of posters in 2021

Candidate poster	Issue poster without images	Issue poster with images
		

¹²⁰ AfD, “Straßenplakate zur Bundestagswahl 2021,” <https://www.afd.de/strassenplakate/> (accessed December 25, 2021).

¹²¹ Dege, “Election posters.”

Table 5. Posters for analysis: all 19 issue-oriented posters with images in 2021¹²²

#	Poster	5	10	15
1				
2				
3				
4				









¹²² Poster numbers are the same for the whole paper. English translation is given on the next page.

Table 6. Original texts on the 2021 posters and their English translation

#	Original text in German	English translation
1	Leben in Freiheit!	Life in freedom!
2	Das Leben muss weitergehen. Auch draußen. Nie wieder Lockdown.	Life must go on. Outside, too. Never again lockdown.
3	Deutschland muss offen bleiben. Nie wieder Lockdown.	Germany must remain open. Never again lockdown.
4	Ich jage lieber Verbrecher aus dem Park als Omas. Kriminelle bekämpfen, Bürger schützen.	I would rather hunt down criminals from the park than grandmas. Fight criminals, protect citizens.
5	Ich liebe die Nacht. Aber nicht den Nachhauseweg. Für sichere Städte.	I love the night. But not the way home. For safe cities.
6	Wofür mein Vater damals nach Deutschland kam? Für deutsche Leitkultur. Unser Land. Unsere Werte.	For what did my father come to Germany then? For German Leitkultur. Our country. Our values.
7	Die Welt retten? Klar, aber: Deutschland zuerst. Probleme lösen statt importieren.	Save the world? Sure, but: Germany first. Solve problems instead of importing them.
8	Verliert auch mal ein Politiker seinen Job nach China? Unsere Wirtschaft verteidigen.	Does a politician also lose his job to China? Defend our economy.
9	Nennt man mich „Solo-Selbständig“, weil mich der Staat immer alleine lässt? Unternehmertum fördern.	Am I called “solo self-employed” because the state always leaves me alone? Support entrepreneurship.
10	Mein Unternehmen ist nicht im DAX. Sondern in Deutschland. Unseren Mittelstand stärken.	My company is not in the DAX. Rather in Germany. Strengthen our small and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs].
11	Berlin macht mehr Mist als unser Vieh. Fairness für Bauern.	Berlin makes more dung than our livestock. Fairness for farmers.
12	Ich fordere: Tempolimit für grüne Verbote! Mobilität ist Freiheit.	I demand: Speed limit for green bans! Mobility is freedom.
13	Seit wann ist Deutschland ein Experiment? Für Energiepolitik mit Verstand.	Since when has Germany been an experiment? For energy policy with understanding.
14	Darf ich noch nach Kreta, Greta? Umweltschutz statt Klima-Panik.	May I still go to Crete, Greta? Environmental protection instead of climate panic.
15	Bestimmen morgen Konzerne, was ich noch sagen darf? Meinungsfreiheit im Netz schützen.	Will corporations determine what I shall still say tomorrow? Protect freedom of speech on the Internet.
16	Ich bin Mutter. Kein „gebärendes Elternteil“. Gender-Gaga stoppen.	I am a mother. Not a “birthing parent”. Stop Gender-Gaga.
17	Wir sind nicht von gestern. Wir sind Zukunft. Familien brauchen Entlastung.	We are not yesterday. We are the future. Families need relief.
18	Unsere Rente teilen wir uns. Aber nicht mit der ganzen Welt. Solidarität braucht Grenzen.	We share our pensions. But not with the whole world. Solidarity needs borders.
19	Ich finde: Unsere Rente gehört uns. Nicht der ganzen Welt. Solidarität braucht Grenzen.	I think: Our pensions belong to us. Not to the whole world. Solidarity needs borders.

Furthermore, two types of material were collected as comparators: social media posts (Table 7) and previous posters (Table 8). The first comparator is 26 posts on the official AfD’s Facebook accounts, collected in May 2022. Facebook was chosen since it has been the central social media platform for AfD as of 2021.¹²³ The extracted posts are the series of “*Deutschland. Aber normal.* (Germany. But normal.)” uploaded in the period starting six weeks before election day and ending on election day, September 26, 2021. Candidate posts were excluded. This comparison helps to find any strategical differences between online and offline. It also examines whether Steffan and Venema’s findings that online posts were more radical in the past elections will still be seen in 2021. The second comparator is AfD’s twelve issue-oriented posters with images for the 2017 election, a series of “*Trau dich, Deutschland!* (Dare, Germany!)”. They were collected in March 2022 from the *HORIZONT* website. I expand on Hansen’s study that examined how strategies changed between 2017 and 2021 by adding multimodal comparisons.

Table 7. Comparator: 26 issue-oriented Facebook posts with images in 2021¹²⁴

<p>A) August 16</p> 	<p>B) August 17</p> 	<p>C) August 18</p> 	<p>D) August 23</p> 
<p>E) August 23</p> 	<p>F) August 25</p> 	<p>G) August 26</p> 	<p>H) August 27</p> 

¹²³ Madelaine Pitt and Hans Pfeifer, “German election: Far-right AfD outperforms competitors on social media,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 27, 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3zZdT>.

¹²⁴ AfD, “All photos,” Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/alternativefuerte/photos> (accessed May 4, 2022). The dates are the dates of posting. Translations of all posts are not attached, but some are presented in the body paragraph. In addition, each post contain a description as well as a picture on the table. As for the description, it is for reference only and is not analysed in detail in this thesis.



















<p>I) August 28</p> 	<p>J) August 30</p> 	<p>K) August 31</p> 	<p>L) September 1</p> 
<p>M) September 2</p> 	<p>N) September 4</p> 	<p>O) September 6</p> 	<p>P) September 7</p> 
<p>Q) September 9</p> 	<p>R) September 11</p> 	<p>S) September 13</p> 	<p>T) September 14</p> 
<p>U) September 16</p> 	<p>V) September 16</p> 	<p>W) September 17</p> 	<p>X) September 18</p> 
<p>Y) September 19</p> 	<p>Z) September 20</p> 		

Table 8. Comparator: 12 issue-oriented posters with images in 2017¹²⁵

<p>a) “Burkas?” We prefer bikinis.</p>	<p>b) “People’s vote?” Direct democracy like in Switzerland.</p>	<p>c) “Euro salvation?” Not at any price!</p>
		
<p>d) “Traditional?” We like it.</p>	<p>e) “New Germans?” We will make them ourselves.</p>	<p>f) “Colourful diversity?” We already have it.</p>
		
<p>g) “Burka?” I prefer Burgundy!</p>	<p>h) “The Islam?” Doesn’t fit our kitchen.</p>	<p>i) “Welfare state?” Needs borders!</p>
		
<p>j) “In distress?” More like the next crime wave!</p>	<p>k) “The Germans?” Will not finance you a better life.</p>	<p>l) COURAGE FOR GERMANY</p>
		

¹²⁵ HORIZONT, “Wahlplakate der AfD: Populistisch, auch populär?” <https://www.horizont.net/galerien/Populistisch-nicht-populaer-3255> (accessed March 13, 2022).

6 Analysis and Discussion

“A poster can hold the gaze of hurrying passers-by or drivers for three to four seconds,” the communications scientist Frank Brettschneider explains.¹²⁶ Perhaps keen observers of election posters would be a minority. Most people only glance at them for a moment. Election posters thus serve to convey messages, ideas, and promises as well as leave stronger impressions of the political party in just a few seconds. Political parties use various strategies to maximise the effectiveness of their election posters. *What strategies can be read from AfD’s election posters in 2021 within the historical and socio-political context of Germany?*

6.1 Phase 1 and 2: First Impression and Salient Features

My first impression of the AfD’s 2021 posters was an overall sense of unity. The design was sophisticated and serene, with no sense of extremeness or negativity. The posters looked uncharacteristic of a radical right-wing populist party that often tries to appeal to negative emotions. Moreover, as Hansen mentions, the topics portrayed by the posters dispersed, unlike the 2017 posters that concentrated on the immigration issue (Table 9). This trend, which seems to be aimed at a more diverse range of supporters, diverges from my previous impression that the AfD’s leading target group was concentrated among xenophobic persons. The protagonists on the posters also vary in gender and age group, unlike the 2017 posters frequently using young females. However, it is noticeable that only white-skinned people appear. I further found that AfD did not directly and negatively depict or mention what it has seen as its enemies, such as Islam, the EU or Euro, and candidates of other political parties. The absence of these contents should be one contributor to preventing extremeness and negativity. One exception is Poster 14 on environmental policy, which features the Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg.

¹²⁶ Dege, “Election posters.”

The individual posters are detailed below, but here are some common salient features. On the 2021 posters, up to six elements are depicted: slogan, party logo, German flag-coloured band, image, Sans Serif white text on the image, and light blue (party-coloured) band with Serif white text. The first three elements are common to all posters, and the layouts are perfectly consistent. Although the images and textual contents vary from poster to poster, the size of the images, the font, and the layout are uniform. Only Poster 1 lacks the light blue band and the white text on it. Overall, the design is so regulated that a glance at the posters gives a sense of unity. In its design handbook, AfD states that it worked intensively on image renewal and aimed at presenting a united front as the party as a whole, attempting to consolidate its power.¹²⁷ The party would have tried to dispel the negative image of the repeated internal conflicts.

Table 9. Issues addressed by each poster and post¹²⁸

Issues	Posters in 2021 (Table 5)	Facebook posts in 2021 (Table 7)	Posters in 2017 (Table 8)
COVID-19	1, 2, 3	B, H, J, N, O, S, W	N/A
Internal security	4, 5	G, M, Q	j
Asylum, immigration	6, 7	D, E, L, P, V	a, e, f, g, h, i, j, k
Afghanistan	N/A	A, E, G, K, P, Q, T	N/A
Economy, labour	8, 9, 10, 11	Y	N/A
Environment, energy	11, 12, 13, 14	Y	N/A
Internet	15	N/A	N/A
Gender, family, children	16, 17	C, U, Z	d, e
Pensions, welfare	18, 19	C	i, k
EU, Euro	N/A	N/A	c
Direct democracy	N/A	N/A	b
German language	N/A	R	N/A
Negative campaign	N/A	A, E, H, K, O, T, V, W, X	N/A
Election	N/A	F, I	N/A
General	N/A	N/A	l

¹²⁷ AfD, *Frisch und frei. Das neue Erscheinungsbild der Alternative* (Berlin: Alternative für Deutschland, June 2021), 3.

¹²⁸ Table 9 displays the analytic results of the sub-question: Which issue is each poster and post relevant to?

6.2 Phase 3: Intra- and Cross-modal Analysis

The posters contain five communication modes: colour, typography, text, image, and layout.

What strategies can be identified when looking at each mode individually or together?¹²⁹

6.2.1 Colour

The most important colour for AfD is light blue. It is the party colour and part of its identity.¹³⁰

This colour is always used for AfD's advertisements, so viewers can recognise the light blue posters at a glance as belonging to AfD. This approach of using the party's colours as the centrepiece of the design is often used by other parties as well (Figure 5). On the 2021 posters, the light blue bands and the light blue logo express the AfD's identity unitedly. Moreover, AfD tried to give a fresher, more contemporary look with a new introduction of colour gradient from 2021.¹³¹ Likewise, the German flag-coloured band uses the colour gradient effect. This band is casually placed below each image yet contributes to adding a German touch. It appears to convey that AfD is a Germany First party, prioritising Germany heavily. AfD claims that this so-called "Band des Bundes (Band of the Federation)" symbolises patriotism and AfD members working for Germany daily.¹³²

Figure 4. The 2021 slogan with the Band des Bundes



Since some of them cover multiple issues (e.g. Afghanistan and asylum), they appear duplicated in the table. Regarding Facebook posts, basically only the image part of the post is referred to, and the descriptive text (typed directly on the Facebook platform) is not taken into account. For example, Post R dealing with language issues mentions gender issues in its description.

¹²⁹ There is no separate sub-section on layout, as this has already been discussed in section 6.1. The content crossing layout and other modes is pointed out in the sub-sections on other modes.

¹³⁰ AfD, *Frisch und frei*, 8.

¹³¹ AfD, 8.

¹³² AfD, 10, 18.

Figure 5. Six parties' election posters for the 2021 Bundestag election¹³³



The overall poster colour scheme in 2021, especially the colour tones of the images, is muted and natural. Saturation, which expresses emotional temperature,¹³⁴ is low and creates calmness. The absence of primary colours and low purity also represents a complex and uncertain real world. These characteristics can be seen throughout the 2021 posters; colour creates coherence and link between them. In the case of 2017 posters, however, colour serves to create classifications. While Posters e, f and g, which depict Germans based on AfD's definition, are bright and vivid, Posters j and k, which depict refugees and migrants, have a limited and darker colour scheme. In addition, black occupies Posters j and k a lot. Black has the opposite meaning of white, which connotes truth and purity.¹³⁵ Nothing reminds evil more than black. This simple use of colour helped AfD simplify complex issues and divide the pure German people and their

¹³³ Achim Schaffrinna, "Die Plakate zur Bundestagswahl 2021," *Design Tagebuch*, August 5, 2021, <https://www.designtagebuch.de/die-plakate-zur-bundestagswahl-2021/> (accessed May 23, 2022). The respective party colours are: magenta for LINKE, black for CDU, yellow for FDP, red for SPD, and green for GRÜNE.

¹³⁴ Machin and Ledin, *Introduction*, 100.

¹³⁵ Machin and Ledin, 89.

enemies. Compared to these 2017 posters, the 2021 posters tell AfD's intention to portray what it is fighting for, rather than what it is against.¹³⁶

Despite the intention of keeping the campaign tone normal and positive in its Facebook posts,¹³⁷ their use of colour conveys negativity. The overall posts are highly saturated and, therefore, emotionally intense. Unlike the 2021 posters, highly pure red and black bands are frequently used, containing incendiary words toward AfD's enemies. These colours help appeal to negative feelings of anger and fear. Furthermore, colours in images are often unnatural. Particularly in Post M, the colours of the women's images are inverted with the possible intention of further inciting anxiety and fear. AfD also exploits the colours of other parties (e.g. yellow and cyan of FDP, green of GRÜNE, and magenta of LINKE) in its negative campaign posts. This kind of colour approach never appears on the posters.

6.2.2 *Typography*

The AfD's 2021 posters contain two fonts: Barlow Condensed Bold Italic and Bitter Medium (Table 10). The former is one of the Sans Serif fonts. Ann Van Wagener, a graphic designer at Poynter Institute, mentions that Sans Serif in all caps has "impact and drama and will grab reader's attention".¹³⁸ Indeed, among all the text elements on the posters, texts using this font can attract the most viewers' attention even from a distance. In order to enhance readability, extra effects are also used: the background colour of the white texts is darkened and blurred, and the text size of keywords is jumped to highlight them effectively. Furthermore, AfD intentionally italicised the font to emphasise and express that the texts are testimonies of protagonists on the posters.¹³⁹ The testimonies are placed next to the protagonists, creating a narrative of who makes the statements. This way of expression gives the impression that AfD

¹³⁶ AfD, *Frisch und frei*, 14.

¹³⁷ AfD, 33.

¹³⁸ Machin and Ledin, *Introduction*, 115–6.

¹³⁹ AfD, *Frisch und frei*, 23.

is listening to each and every citizen. In contrast, most of the texts in the 2021 Facebook posts are not italicised, and exceptions are basically quotes. That could be because these posts represent AfD’s opinions, not testimonies of protagonists.

The latter is a Serif font used for the text on the light blue bands. Van Wagener points out that Serif gives a “solid and emotionally neutral” impression.¹⁴⁰ With this characteristic, the font of Bitter Medium contributes to making the AfD’s 2021 posters moderate. Additionally, by applying the same design to the band placed above the image and the slogan “*Aber normal.*”, AfD appears to hint at what the “normal” Germany is and what is essential for achieving it. Indeed, AfD insists that the light blue band is used to make the political demand clearer.¹⁴¹ For instance, the light blue bands on Poster 2 and 3 say, “Never again lockdown,” denoting that for Germany to be normal, it should no longer introduce any lockdowns. In addition, regarding layout, the light blue band is “rotated by 1° pointing upwards, never pointing downwards.”¹⁴² The upturned pattern would give a positive impression that the situation is gradually improving or that a bright future awaits.

Table 10. Fonts used on the AfD’s 2021 posters

1.	Barlow Condensed Bold Italic (Sans Serif)
<p>ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZÄÖÜß</p> <p>abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzäöü 1234567890</p>	
<hr/>	
2.	Bitter Medium (Serif)
<p>ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZÄÖÜß</p> <p>abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzäöü 1234567890</p>	

¹⁴⁰ Machin and Ledin, *Introduction*, 115–6.
¹⁴¹ AfD, *Frisch und frei*, 23.
¹⁴² AfD, 23.

6.2.3 Text

All the 2021 posters have testimonies of the protagonists, many of which use the first person in German (ich, mich, mein; wir, uns, unser). In addition to the italicised letters and the layout of phrases, the first person further enhances the effectiveness of conveying messages as the testimonies of the posters' protagonists rather than the AfD's opinion. Next, all posters contain the word *Deutschland* (Germany) due to the slogan, and five testimonies out of 19 additionally use it. The party emphasises that it is a Germany First party by repeating "Germany" together with the Band des Bundes. They could leave a stronger impression that the topic is about Germany, not anywhere else. Other keywords in the testimonies are highlighted by increasing the font size. Examples include the keywords *Leitkultur* in the context of migration and integration issues and *mother* in the context of gender issues. Moreover, there are several contrasts between words and words, words and images: e.g. Germany versus the rest of the world, urban versus rural areas, and politicians versus blue-collar workers.

Compared with texts on the 2021 posters, those on Facebook posts in 2021 and posters in 2017 give more straightforward and aggressive impressions. That is because AfD directly and negatively mentions what it has seen as its enemies, namely Islam and Euro on the 2017 posters and other political parties and their members on the 2021 posts. Another finding from the comparison is that the Facebook posts include a relatively massive amount of words. I can assume that posters have fewer words since they need to attract the attention of passers-by in a few seconds as a tool for informing, mobilising, and convincing the broader public.¹⁴³ If much text is crammed into a poster, readability and legibility will be largely lost. On the other hand, social media posts have more detailed messages because they play a role in communicating with followers to strengthen the tie between campaigners and their supporters.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Steffan and Venema, "New medium," 372–5.

¹⁴⁴ Steffan and Venema, 384.

6.2.4 Image

In the 2021 posters, AfD used images that looked like captures of everyday life to convey “what it fights *for*, rather than *against*.”¹⁴⁵ This is a significant change compared to posters with many extraordinary scenes in 2017 (Posters b, c, f, g, h, i, j, and k). Compared to Facebook posts, there are no overtly manipulated images. AfD mentions, “as the party of ordinary people in this country, we do not need contrived photography.”¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, to show authentic moments from real life, AfD did not appoint perfectly-styled models.¹⁴⁷ Each image on the 2021 posters shows one or a few “general” characters based on AfD’s definition.¹⁴⁸ Overall, the protagonists vary in gender and age group; however, they are only white, and no African or Asian looking people are shown at all. AfD suggests Germany is a white society. Some of the Facebook posts and previous posters use non-white images only in the context of migration or Afghanistan issues.

Many other striking symbols appear on the 2017 posters and 2021 Facebook posts. Regarding the 2017 posters, multicoloured bikinis on Poster a, Alpenhorns with the Swiss flag on Poster b, a one-euro coin on Poster c, wine on Poster g, a pig on Poster h, and traditional German costumes on Poster f (a Dirndl of southern Germany; a folk costume of Sorbs in Saxony and Brandenburg; and a Bollenhut of the Black Forest) are used. Facebook posts also often use symbols that mostly give a negative impression: a Muslim-looking man with a turban and a weapon on Poster A, rubbish on Poster B, other parties’ politicians on Posters E, H, K, O, T, W, and X, and US transport aircraft on Posters G and Q. The fact that the 2021 posters seem to lack such symbols mentioned above is probably a result of the focus on ordinary people everywhere. However, people’s clothing and items that suggest scenes create a discourse by combining with other elements, especially the text.

¹⁴⁵ AfD, *Frisch und frei*, 14.

¹⁴⁶ AfD, 14.

¹⁴⁷ AfD, 14.

¹⁴⁸ Poster 1 displays the back view of a large number of people but focuses on one person.

6.3 Phase 4 and 5: Discourse Analysis

Last but not least, this section analyses and discusses discourses conveyed by the 2021 posters and their target audiences for each relevant issue or topic.

6.3.1 COVID-19

Posters 1, 2, and 3 are related to COVID-19, which the WHO declared a pandemic in March 2020. Poster 1 contains no individual mode directly related to COVID-19; however, it is implied by a combination of the image of crowded people at a live concert which had no restriction before the pandemic, the word freedom, plus the fact that the 2021 Bundestag elections took place during the pandemic. In contrast, Posters 2 and 3 specify lockdown policies. They all criticise restrictions on outings, such as gathering restrictions and lockdowns, by constructively and brightly depicting a “normal” life before the pandemic. The pandemic is thus not framed by public health or medical care but by freedom to go out or economy. This framing tells that AfD targets those who are tired of COVID-19 regulations and those who prioritise economics over healthcare. Nevertheless, AfD proposed no solution to combat the coronavirus and only criticised the government’s policies. As Lembcke mentions, AfD was not too extreme to deny the existence of the coronaviruses.¹⁴⁹ By recalling and glorifying everyday life before the pandemic, not a specific historical event, the three posters appeal to feelings of nostalgia. This approach is relatively moderate for AfD, who often appeals to negative emotions.

On the other hand, seven Facebook posts (Posts B, H, J, N, O, S, and W) have more radical impressions than the posters. Their extremeness comes from combinations of incendiary language, macabre photos, and the colours red and black. Compared with the posters, the first thing that stands out is using images of other parties’ politicians for negative campaigning: Post H uses Merkel (CDU), and Posts O and W use Scholz (SPD). Merkel, in particular, has long

¹⁴⁹ Lembcke, *Populism*, 73–86.

been seen as hostile by AfD, portrayed as a symbol of the corrupt elite, and demonised as a threat to the pure people's livelihoods. In such negative campaigns, anti-elitist othering discourses can be read. Additionally, Posts J and N use othering discourses that distinguish between the unvaccinated as "us" and the rest as "others". Unlike the 2021 posters, these posts refer to policies other than the lockdown: vaccination, 3G and 2G rules.¹⁵⁰ In addition to differences in the target audience, differences in production timing were also most likely to impact it. After the posters were produced, discussions on vaccination may have heated up. Social media posts are advantageous because they can be created relatively quickly, easily and inexpensively.

Furthermore, some Facebook posts contain historicity or metaphors. Among the nine posts, Post W most explicitly evoke historical events. This post is relevant to the EU COVID-19 recovery fund and reminiscent of the European debt crisis by naming Greece and Spain. Representing the public dissatisfaction with the way Germany has assumed financial burdens of other countries is something AfD has been doing since its foundation. AfD tried to create a discourse that the EU COVID-19 recovery fund is another new burden for Germany. Concerning the use of metaphor, Post B is the best example. Luca is an application for tracking the route of coronavirus infection. AfD implies in this post that the app is rubbish. Not only does it state that the app is "useless", but it also uses pictures of rubbish in the background.

6.3.2 *Internal security*

Posters 4 and 5 deal with internal security by referring to public safety. On Poster 4, a middle-aged white male police officer says, "I would rather hunt down criminals from the park than grandmas," while looking at something behind the camera. Here, criminals and grandmothers are contrasted, and it is unclear why he specifically uses "grandmas" as a representative

¹⁵⁰ 3G rule means people have to show certificates of being fully vaccinated (*geimpft*), recovered (*genesen*), or tested (*getestet*) to enter public spaces. 2G is stricter than 3G: Only fully vaccinated or recovered persons are admitted.

example of citizens. One campaign leaflet with the same police officer quotes a statistic that “60% of women in Germany regularly avoid certain places, streets or parks for fear of crime.”¹⁵¹ Perhaps grandmas symbolise fragile women who need to be protected, or they are just the direct target group. In addition, the leaflet indicates that “the high proportion of foreigners in serious violent crimes is also striking.”¹⁵² Like this, AfD has referred to foreign crime frequently. Poster 4 does not mention it, but viewers might easily guess that AfD intends foreign crime.

Poster 5 shows a young white woman anxiously looking behind her. She is on her way home on a winter night. The brightly lit city at night in the background suggests that the place is urban. Although the poster does not denote what is dangerous, it may be reminiscent of the 2015-16 New Year’s Eve sexual assaults across Germany, particularly in Cologne. Many of the suspects were North African-Arabic migrants. These mass assaults by migrants were a turning point in changing public opinion of the welcoming culture. Ralf Bosen at *Deutsche Welle* says, “[c]itizens who until then had no concerns felt a newfound need for security.”¹⁵³ In short, Posters 4 and 5 indirectly frame asylum and immigration issues by securitisation: The influx of migrants and refugees worsens public security. The leading target group is those who fear an increased crime risk in public spaces, especially women of various generations.

Post M on Facebook portrays the same issue much more directly and aggressively. With the colour-reversed image of a surprised woman with a hand over her mouth, it specifies, “Shocking! In NRW alone: One gang rape every three days!” It then adds that “the proportion of non-German suspects in these cases is approximately 46%” in its description.¹⁵⁴ As already mentioned, the 2017 Poster j also criminalises and demonises boat migrants. The Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman points out that some politicians try to benefit from simplifying

¹⁵¹ AfD, “Handzettel A5 Sicherheit,” https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2021/07/Handzettel_A5_Sicherheit.pdf (accessed May 24, 2022).

¹⁵² AfD.

¹⁵³ Ralf Bosen, “New Year’s Eve in Cologne: 5 years after the mass assaults,” *Deutsche Welle*, December 31, 2020, <https://p.dw.com/p/3nH9L>.

¹⁵⁴ AfD, “Allein in NRW: Alle drei Tage eine Gruppenvergewaltigung!” Facebook, September 2, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/alternativefuerde/photos/4605225006174469/> (accessed May 24, 2022).

the complex global issues surrounding the refugee crisis through the rhetoric of securitisation, which criminalises refugees or migrants.¹⁵⁵ Bauman additionally addresses the impact of securitisation on the bystanders: “the policy of ‘securitization’ helps to stifle in advance our – the bystanders’ – pangs of conscience at the sight of its suffering targets (...).”¹⁵⁶ The AfD’s strategy for the 2021 posters is not only to justify the exclusion of migrants through the securitisation discourse but also to euphemise it and avoid criticism that AfD is xenophobic.

6.3.3 Immigration

Poster 6 uses the word German *Leitkultur* (leading culture). AfD has repeatedly used this historically controversial word as an antonym of multiculturalism. The term initially appeared in German politics in the early 2000s while fierce debates over the immigration law under the then pro-immigrant SPD Gerhard Schröder government (1998-2005). Friedrich Merz (CDU) first exploited the term to criticise the Schröder government, demanding that immigrants assimilate the German culture and values.¹⁵⁷

Before Schröder, the CDU Helmut Kohl government (1982-1998) did not recognise Germany as an immigration country despite the 5.6 million foreign population, representing 7% of the total population as of 1990.¹⁵⁸ Unlike major immigration countries such as the US and Australia founded by settlers, Germany had long adopted *jus sanguinis* (the principle of descent). The conservative government was not friendly to non-natives and people with migrant roots settling in Germany.¹⁵⁹ This attitude later resulted in parallel societies, namely isolated

¹⁵⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 20.

¹⁵⁶ Bauman, 22.

¹⁵⁷ Artur Ciechanowicz, *Germany’s ‘refugee’ problem. The most important test for Chancellor Merkel and the grand coalition* (Warsaw: OSW COMMENTARY, September 2015), 2–3. Kay-Alexander Scholz, “What is German ‘Leitkultur’?” *Deutsche Welle*, May 3, 2017, <https://p.dw.com/p/2cJjB>.

¹⁵⁸ Dorothea Jung, “Wie Deutschland ein Einwanderungsland wurde,” *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, October 24, 2011, <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/wie-deutschland-ein-einwanderungsland-wurde-100.html> (accessed May 30, 2022). Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung, “Ausländische Bevölkerung (1970-2019),” <https://www.bib.bund.de/DE/Fakten/Fakt/B39-Auslaendische-Bevoelkerung-ab-1970.html> (accessed May 30, 2022). Kohl proclaimed in 1989 that “we are not a country of immigration. And we can’t become it either.” The government treated Turkish immigrants as a nuisance.

¹⁵⁹ Christian Joppke, *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain*

communities created by a minority of people with similar ethnic or religious backgrounds. In the context of German society, parallel societies mainly refer to the largest migrant group of Turkish Muslims.¹⁶⁰ Successive governments under Schröder and Merkel had constantly debated their integration into German society.

AfD recontextualises the history: If Germany does not make immigrants follow *Leitkultur*, parallel societies will be repeated.¹⁶¹ Now that CDU has become more tolerant of immigrants under Merkel, AfD seems to speak for the anti-immigration people. Nonetheless, the discourse conveyed by Poster 6 is not strictly anti-immigration or xenophobic. Judging from the text, the young white female protagonist is a second-generation immigrant in Germany. She has a migrant background but respects *Leitkultur*. Her facial expression is proud. This depiction suggests that this poster targets so-called “patriotically-minded migrants”. It would be attributed to the fact that many voters having immigrant backgrounds, such as Russian-Germans, voted for AfD in past elections.¹⁶²

The 2017 posters and the 2021 Facebook posts never depict migrants or people with migrant backgrounds living inside Germany. Rather, campaign contents like Poster e (“New Germans?”

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-2. Naito, *Islam*, 237.

¹⁶⁰ Katharina Belwe et al., *Parallelgesellschaften?* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2006), <https://www.bpb.de/publikationen/URZDVA>.

¹⁶¹ AfD, *Unser Programm zur Bundestagswahl 2021* (Berlin: Alternative für Deutschland, 2021), 158. <https://www.afd.de/wahlprogramm/>. According to the 2021 manifesto, AfD defines *Leitkultur* as follows:

Our identity is shaped by our German language, our values, our history and our culture. The latter are closely linked to Christianity, the Enlightenment, our artistic and scientific works. Our identity determines the fundamental values that are passed on from generation to generation. The German *Leitkultur* describes our consensus of values, which is identity-forming for our people and distinguishes us from others. It ensures the cohesion of society and is a prerequisite for the functioning of our state. The community-building effect of German culture is the foundation of our Basic Law and cannot be replaced by constitutional patriotism.

Cultural relativism and multiculturalism lead to a next to and against each other parallel societies that lack common values for living together. In such a fragmented society, conflicts arise that can hardly be controlled. The AfD will not allow Germany to lose its traditional culture out of misunderstood tolerance of Islam.

¹⁶² Rebecca Staudenmaier, “‘The New Germans’: Far-right AfD forms immigrant supporters’ group,” *Deutsche Welle*, March 18, 2019, <https://p.dw.com/p/3FGM3>. Michael A. Hansen and Jonathan Olsen, “Pulling up the Drawbridge: Anti-Immigrant Attitudes and Support for the Alternative for Germany among Russian-Germans,” *German Politics and Society* 38, no. 2 (2020): 109-136, <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2020.380205>.

We will make them ourselves.) include discourses that emphasise pedigree. Anton Friesen, an AfD politician with an immigrant background, told *Deutsche Welle* in 2019 that he wanted to wipe off the party's public image of an anti-immigration stance.¹⁶³ He and other AfD politicians with immigrant backgrounds created immigrant supporters' *Die Neudeutschen* (The New Germans) group. Nevertheless, their stance is that AfD only allows immigrants who adapt and assimilate to the German *Leitkultur*.¹⁶⁴ Taking into account that the white woman is used, Poster 6 also implies that no heterogeneity of inner or outer appearance is desired.

6.3.4 *Asylum*

A middle-aged man on Poster 7 stands in front of a building with lots of graffiti. The not-artistic graffiti makes the area look unsafe. "Germany First" is highlighted in his testimony, reminding the former US President Donald Trump's "America First" catchphrase. Under his anti-immigration populist politics, Trump famously declared that he would build a wall between the US and Mexico. The tendency to prioritise one's own country is one of the features of populists. In addition, the text "importing problems" on Poster 7 implies asylum and immigration issues despite no direct mention. The poster thus suggests that accepting refugees and migrants will bring problems to Germany, targeting Germany-First and anti-immigration people. This poster might appeal more to East Germans, who are relatively more xenophobic and do not share historical guilt that drives a sense of mission to save the world.

Regarding the topic of asylum, it should be noted that no poster uses words or images of Afghanistan refugees. As the issue of Afghanistan only came up shortly before the election day, in August 2021, AfD could not reflect the issue on posters, likewise vaccination of the COVID-19 issue.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, seven Facebook posts (Posts A, E, G, K, P, Q, and T) deal with

¹⁶³ Staudenmaier.

¹⁶⁴ Staudenmaier.

¹⁶⁵ Two additional posters *without* images were uploaded relating to Afghanistan, which are outside the scope of the analysis (Appendix 2).

Afghanistan. Some of them visually and verbally conduct negative campaigns against other parties by connecting them with Afghan issues: LINKE with a shadow of the hammer and sickle on Post A,¹⁶⁶ Baerbock (GRÜNE) on Post E, the then Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU) on Post K, and the then Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) on Posts K and T. Furthermore, the term “massive asylum wave” on Post E recontextualises the refugee and migrant crisis, during which Merkel declared that Germany would accept refugees. Posts G and Q contain the message that criminals are mixed up among Afghan refugees, as in Poster j in 2017. The othering approach is used to treat the pure German people as “us” and the Afghan refugees coming from outside as “others”. In addition, these two posts use the image of US transport aircraft with the German-flag background, highlighting that Germany should stop foreign forces (the US) from bringing foreign issues (Afghanistan) to the country. The basic meaning is the same as Poster 7 but more concrete.

6.3.5 Economy and labour

AfD covers a wide range of occupations in Posters 8, 9, 10, and 11: blue-collar workers, solo self-employed persons, employers or employees in SMEs, and farmers. All the posters depict the frustrations and anxieties of relatively low-paid or precarious workers. Firstly, a helmeted white man in blue work clothes on Poster 8 laments that their jobs might be lost to China and implies that politicians do not share his fear. Secondly, a white woman on Poster 9 mentions that the German government is neglecting the solo self-employed persons. Their incomes are generally more likely to be insecure. These two posters contrast the elite politicians and the protagonists. Thirdly, an older white man on Poster 10 appears to have a headache due to problems related to his small domestic company. Here, domestic SMEs and big international companies in the DAX like Siemens are contrasted.¹⁶⁷ Finally, a farmer man at pasture on

¹⁶⁶ The hammer and sickle is a symbol of communism. LINKE has its origins in the former Communist Party of East Germany.

¹⁶⁷ The DAX is the German stock index reflecting the performance of 40 leading companies.

Poster 11 is unsatisfied with environmental obligations that impose financial burdens on farmers, most of which are issued by the government in Berlin. His opinion is that the capital pollutes the environment more than his agriculture. The contrast between Berlin and rural areas, politicians and farmers is conducted.

In summary, these four posters use an othering approach that separates the economically vulnerable from the elite, like politicians and big companies. The portrayals above could speak more for East Germans' feelings than those of West Germans. As mentioned in Chapter 2.5, over half of those living in the former East German region feel as if they were second-class citizens due to economic disparities.¹⁶⁸

While AfD does not address this economic and labour issue with the 2017 posters, one Facebook post in 2021 does. Post Y develops the discourse that climate protection policies can lead to large-scale job losses, quoting the IG Metall union's president Jörg Hofmann. AfD weighs the economy and the environment and gives priority to the former.

6.3.6 *Environment and energy*

The low priority of environmental protection is also evident in Posters 12, 13, and 14. On Poster 12, a Yorkshire terrier peeking out of a car window is against restrictions on car travel for environmental protection.¹⁶⁹ Its fur suggests that the car is running, expressing enjoyable and comfortable driving. Lei Jia et al. found that pet-based advertising evokes consumers' past experiences interacting with their pets, influencing their decision-making. Also, using dogs enhances the persuasiveness of promotion-focused advertisements.¹⁷⁰ Poster 12 thus promotes

¹⁶⁸ *Deutsche Welle*, "Former East Germany."

¹⁶⁹ It is the only animal photographed on the 2021 posters. Regarding the use of animals, two posters in 2017 also used a pig (Poster h) and vultures (Poster i). Both the dog and the pig look adorable; however, the pig is used in the context of pork, which would seem cruel and creepy. In addition, four black vultures monitoring the border look ruthless and cold-blooded. It has the effect of confusing asylum-seekers and illegal migrants.

¹⁷⁰ Lei Jia, Xiaojing Yang, and Yuwei Jiang, "The Pet Exposure Effect: Exploring the Differential Impact of Dogs Versus Cats on Consumer Mindsets," *Journal of Marketing* (March 2022): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221078036>. On the contrary, cats are effective for prevention-focused advertisements.

car travel and opposes its restrictions in a persuasive and non-radical way. Framing the environmental protection policies by freedom of mobility, the poster targets those who prioritise freedom of mobility over environmental protection.

Poster 14 also targets the same people by framing the environmental policies by unrestricted mobility of planes. A white-skinned girl by the window stares at the sky with an anxious and sad expression. The rain is like her tears. She wishes to travel to the Greek island of Creta. Only this poster uses the name of a specific person, Greta Thunberg, and opposes environmental protection as climate panic. It reminds Greta's extreme environmental action to cross the Atlantic Ocean by yacht instead of a plane in 2019;¹⁷¹ however, it has no radical impression. It is accomplished by portraying the content as the genuine question of the small girl. Also, the rhyme of Creta and Greta will likely leave a lasting impression on the viewer.

Poster 13 approaches environmental energy issues by depicting rural areas, similar to poster 11. In front of a man, several wind turbines line a grassy field. No facial expression is visible, but the overcast grey sky gives the man's back a melancholy look. The impression is that renewable energy development or "experiments" for environmental protection is being carried out without consent in rural communities. It also ironically implies that installing wind turbines for environmental protection may destroy the environment. Although electricity consumption is usually higher in urban areas, the location of the wind turbines is mostly in rural areas. Therefore, rural populations suffer more from their presence. By contrasting urban and rural areas, the poster targets people mainly living in rural areas who feel uncomfortable, excessive or harmful to renewable energy policies.

¹⁷¹ *BBC*, "Greta Thunberg to sail Atlantic for climate conferences," July 29, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49156223>.

6.3.7 Internet

What Poster 15 talks about is freedom of speech on the Internet, which is not addressed by previous posters or Facebook posts. It frames social media regulation in terms of freedom of speech. The direct target would be those who feel uncomfortable with the Network Enforcement Act [NetzDG] and feel it is censorship. The former German government pioneered the world in enforcing that social media law in 2017. It covers all social media platforms with more than two million users. For instance, the law obligates operators to remove all illegal content within 24 hours.¹⁷² Under this context, the highlighted keyword “corporations (*Konzerne*)” in the testimony must mean social media mega-companies like Meta and Twitter.

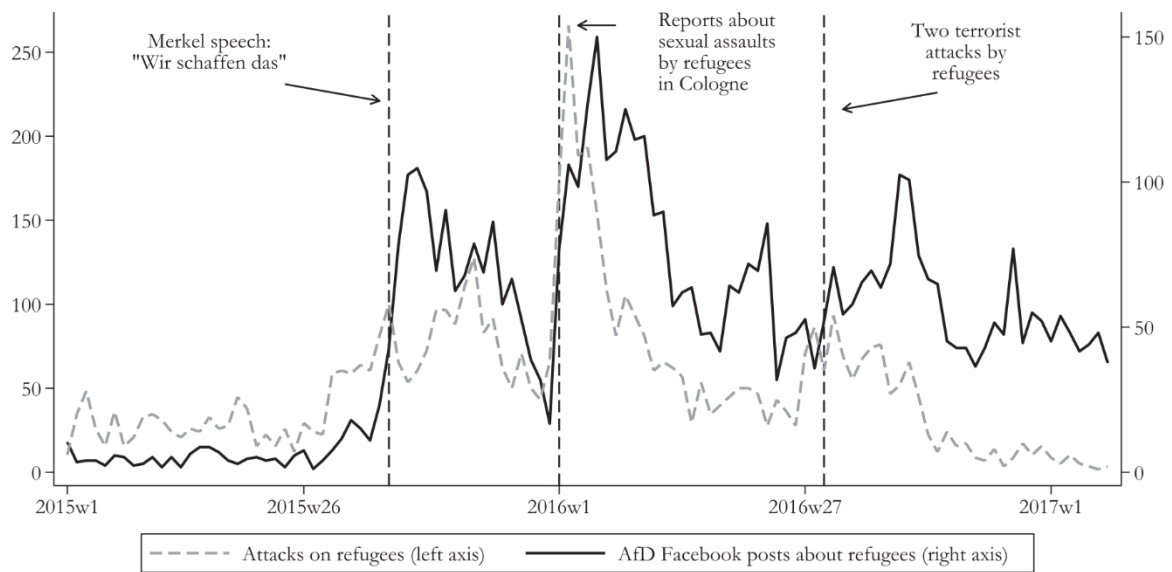
The background to introducing the NetzDG is related to the increase in fake news, conspiracy theories, and online hate speech. Their spreading speed, scope, and impact are by far the greatest. They are not only temporarily spread but also prolonged, which intensifies their toxicity.¹⁷³ Furthermore, there is a risk of leading to violent behaviour in the real world. Karsten Müller and Carlo Schwarz at the University of Warwick found a strong association between AfD’s anti-refugee posts on Facebook and physical attacks on refugees (Figure 6). They argue that “social media can act as a propagation mechanism for violent crimes by enabling the spread of extreme viewpoints.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Bundesministerium der Justiz, “Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks (Network Enforcement Act, NetzDG) - Basic Information (2017),” https://www.bmj.de/DE/Themen/FokusThemen/NetzDG/NetzDG_EN_node.html (accessed May 30, 2022).

¹⁷³ Keipi et al., *Online Hate*, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Karsten Müller and Carlo Schwarz, “Fanning the Flames of Hate: Social Media and Hate Crime,” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 19, no. 4 (August 2021): 2131, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeea/jvaa045>.

Figure 6. Correlation between AfD's anti-refugee posts and attacks on refugees¹⁷⁵



Whether framing social media regulation by free speech or by violent risk is very similar to the question that Sniderman and Theriault examined framing theory (Chapter 4.3). The social media law certainly has the risk of becoming censorship depending on governments due to the ambiguity of definitions of illegal content. However, the AfD's biggest concern is perhaps that the NetzDG may limit its radical transmissions. The NetzDG must be troubling for AfD, which has communicated to its supporters through social media rather than mass media. Therefore, it strategically used the frame of free speech.

6.3.8 Gender, family and children

Both Posters 16 and 17 take place in a peaceful daytime park, depicting family. The first poster depicts a white woman holding and smiling at a baby. Considering her testimony, she is a mother and emphasises that she is not a "birthing parent". The traditional term "mother" is contrasted with the gender-neutral language "birthing parent", which includes, for example, transgender men. This othering narrative – conservatives versus LGBT+ people and their allies

¹⁷⁵ Müller and Schwarz, 2139.

– shows AfD’s homophobic view. “Mother” would also connote traditional gender roles where the mother is responsible for raising her children at home while the father works outside. Furthermore, the term Gender-Gaga on the light blue band means gender equality measures are incorrect or exaggerated. The wording is similar to that of Poster 14, climate panic.

The framing of gender issues by the use of language can be seen in Facebook posts as well. Although the central topic of Post R is the German language, it has an additional explanation that “our language is being threatened and destroyed in many ways – by gender mania, by an excess of Anglicisms, by the decline in standards caused by left-wing education policies.” The German language is an essential part of *Leitkultur* for AfD,¹⁷⁶ and the gender-neutral language is not included within the scope of *Leitkultur*.

Poster 17 presents a young family with the traditional structure (mother, father, and child) while the baby is not visible. It argues that reducing the burden on younger families is necessary for Germany’s future. Posters and posts depicting families and children are always in subdued colour tones and less radical (Poster 17, d, e, Post U, and Z); however, the AfD’s commitment to traditional family structures is palpable. For instance, Poster d in 2017 also contains silhouettes of a family of four (mother, father, and children) on the beach. In short, AfD considers families with conventional structures to be ideal. AfD is hostile towards gender diversity and insists on the traditional family structure because Germany is an ageing society with low fertility, like other developed countries. AfD emphasises children’s importance in maintaining social welfare systems such as pensions and sustaining cultural identity.¹⁷⁷

6.3.9 Pensions

Posters 18 and 19 referring to pensions are very similar in wording and depiction. An elderly couple on Poster 18 claims that “We share our pensions. But not with the whole world.”

¹⁷⁶ AfD, *Unser Programm*, 158.

¹⁷⁷ AfD, 104–15.

Likewise, an older man on Poster 19 gives an opinion, “Our pensions belong to us. Not to the whole world.” Both posters do not show facial expressions since they are photographed from behind. However, the darker tones, such as the overcast grey sky (Poster 18) and black coloured clothing (Poster 19), give a sense of melancholy. The older protagonists feel unsatisfied with the pension budget used for foreign issues or by “non-Germans”. The terms “borders” on the light blue bands emphasise the contrast between Germany and the rest of the world, giving the impression of the Germany First stance. The target group would be pensioners at risk from poverty in particular. The German state pension system is earning-dependent, so differences in incomes between East and West also lead to differences in pensions. People of the target group could thus concentrate on the East region.

Post C on Facebook also refers to pension. It uses the image of the younger blue-collar man on Poster 8, and the text says, “Pension only at 70?” Unlike Posters 18 and 19, Post C seems to target younger people who will receive pensions in the future. Social media users are relatively young, suggesting different target groups for posters and social media. No poster in 2017 uses the word “pension”; however, there were two posters relating to the welfare system: Posters i and k. The former emphasises “borders” verbally and visually. The latter is in English, targeting non-German speakers, namely immigrants or asylum-seekers. The demonisation of them as social welfare abusers can be read from the images as well.

7 Conclusion

As one of the European radical right-wing populist parties, AfD is the most successful party among all the German radical right wings after World War II, being active both in Germany and the EU. This thesis multimodally analysed populist discourses in AfD's posters for the most recent Bundestag election to identify its campaign strategy. It tried to fill two research gaps: little visual analysis in populism research as well as little research on posters for the 2021 Bundestag election. The research question was: *What strategies can be read from AfD's election posters in 2021 within the historical and socio-political context of Germany?* Multimodal discourse analysis was conducted by constructing sub-questions inspired by four theories. They include multimodality, speech act and image act, framing, and discourse of illusion. The five-phase analytical framework investigated the posters systematically, from first impressions to deeper discourse analysis. As a result, the analysis revealed the factors that give the AfD's 2021 posters a unified and moderate impression, the intended target groups and the discourses embedded in the posters.

The posters are very regular, sophisticated and professional in design. The muted and natural colour scheme and no direct depiction of "enemies" create a moderating effect. Despite this moderate impression, the posters contain a typical populist discourse. Firstly, there are anti-elitist contrasts between the people and the elites. Compared with the 2017 othering narratives, AfD did not frame Muslims as others in 2021. "Normal" German citizens like the economically vulnerable and rural people appear on the posters, some of whom make complaint statements against the elite. The depiction of listening to the pure people conveys the intention that AfD is the sole representative of their views. The analysis also found that the target group of some posters might include more East Germans, bearing in mind the historical and socio-political differences between East and West Germany. Secondly, some posters, particularly on gender and family issues, contain anti-pluralist discourses that adhere to conventional notions. In that

sense, almost all posters desire a return to past Germany as assumed from Alexander's interpretation of "normality".¹⁷⁸

Nonetheless, a new aspect was also discovered that constructively portraying second-generation immigrants in Germany as on "our" side. As a radical right-wing populist, this trial is quite a change from the AfD's past of sticking to ethnicity and frequently demonising refugees and migrants. It does not mean AfD changed its ideology. The AfD's strategy for the 2021 posters is to euphemise the exclusion of outsiders and avoid criticism that AfD is xenophobic. Also, some Facebook posts have salient xenophobic elements. AfD used different campaign tools depending on the target group. From their analysis of the 2013 and 2017 election campaigns, Steffan and Venema demonstrated that online posts were more radical than offline posters due to a limited audience.¹⁷⁹ The polarisation was more intense in 2021.

It should also be noted that the 2021 posters did not contain any Eurosceptic element. Only one of the Facebook posts contains it, but all the negative campaigns were hostile toward national politicians. The manifesto maintains a Eurosceptic ideology, but this thesis could not reveal why AfD used no (poster) or few (Facebook post) Eurosceptic elements in 2021. This topic will be the subject of future research. Furthermore, analysis across multiple campaign tools or a more extended period should provide new insights.

AfD and other European populist parties generally lost support during the COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁸⁰ but it would be premature to conclude that it means the end of populism. I will continue to keep an eye on the AfD's developments multidimensionally.

¹⁷⁸ Alexander, "Normality," 137.

¹⁷⁹ Steffan and Venema, "New medium."

¹⁸⁰ Foa et al., *The Great Reset*, 2.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. The results of MDA

Phases and Sub-questions		All Posters	
1	What first impressions did I have?	An overall sense of unity. No sense of extremeness or negativity. The design was sophisticated and serene. Natural colour scheme. The protagonists on the posters are diverse but only white-skinned.	
2	What is depicted?	Up to six elements: slogan for the election, party logo, Band des Bundes, image, Sans Serif white text, and light blue band with Serif white text.	
	Which issue is it relevant to?	COVID-19; internal security; asylum and immigration; economy and labour; environment and energy; Internet; gender, family and children; and pensions.	
	Does it contain any negativity or hostility?	There is no depiction or mention of what AfD has seen as its enemies, such as Islam, the EU or Euro, and other parties.	
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used? Why do the creators choose individual modes?	Layout	The layout is strictly regulated. The italicised testimonies are placed next to the protagonists, creating a narrative of who makes the statements. The light blue band is “rotated by 1° pointing upwards, never pointing downwards”, which creates positive impressions.
		Colour	The party’s colour, light blue, expresses the AfD’s identity. The Band des Bundes is the German flag colour, symbolising patriotism. Colour gradient: fresher, more contemporary impressions. Dark colours are placed or blurred in the image area below the white text so that it stands out. The overall colour tone is muted and natural. Colour creates coherence.
	Cross-modal analysis: What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Typography	Two fonts: (1) Barlow Condensed Bold Italic: impact, drama, attract attention. Italics express testimonies of protagonists. Impression: AfD is listening to each and every citizen. (2) Bitter Medium: solid and emotionally neutral. The same font and light blue band are used for the slogan “Aber normal.” Political demands to get back a normal Germany.
		Text	All posters have testimonies of protagonists. Many of them use the first person (ich, mich, mein; wir, uns, unser). All posters except Poster 1 have messages on light blue bands indicating political demands. Five posters use the word “Deutschland”: Posters 3, 6, 7, 10, and 13.
	Image	Images of everyday life, focus on individuals. No overtly manipulated images. The protagonists vary in gender and age group; however, they are only white, and no African or Asian looking people are shown at all.	

Phases and Sub-questions		Poster 1	Poster 2	Poster 3	
2	Which issue is it relevant to?	COVID-19	COVID-19	COVID-19	
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used?	Layout, colour, and typography	Only Poster 1 lacks the light blue band. The stage is bright and contrasts sharply with the audience. “Freiheit!” is highlighted	The name tag is party colour. “Leben” and “Auch draussen” are highlighted.	“offen bleiben” is highlighted.
	Why do the creators choose individual modes?	Text	The word “freedom” used here, taking into account the image, can be assumed to be a response to the COVID-19 restriction.	Specifies Lockdown. Criticism of lockdown policies.	Specifies Lockdown. Criticism of lockdown policies. During the lockdown, cafés and restaurants were restricted from operating.
	Cross-modal analysis: What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Image	Live concert venue. Crowds are densely gathered. One person’s back view close-up whose hands raised in excitement. Although their facial expressions are invisible, they must enjoy the live performance.	Inside: possibly office or healthcare organisation. A middle-aged white woman is looking at the camera, smiling. She is wearing white clothes and a light blue name tag.	Outside: in front of a café, with a café sign behind a woman. The young white woman working in the café is smiling and looking into the distance. She is about to put a “Café Open” sign on the street.
4	Who is the target group?	Those who are tired of COVID-19 regulations or those who prioritise economics over healthcare.			
	Framing: How is the issue framed?	The COVID-19 pandemic is not framed by public health or medical care, but by freedom to go out or economy.			
5	Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised?	Not a specific historical event, but everyday life before the pandemic is recalled and glorified.			
	Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean?	No mode is directly related to COVID-19. It is implied by a combination of the image, the text, and the fact that the election took place during the	N/A	N/A	

	pandemic.		
Othering: Who is “us” and who are “others”?	N/A	N/A	N/A
2021 Facebook posts	COVID-19: More radical than the posters: incendiary language, macabre photos, and the colours red and black. Negative campaigning (Merkel and Scholz). Not only lockdowns but also vaccination, 3G and 2G rules. Connections between the EU COVID-19 recovery fund and the European debt crisis, as well as Luca application and rubbish.		
2017 posters	N/A		

Phases and Sub-questions		Poster 4	Poster 5
2	Which issue is it relevant to?	Internal security	Internal security
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used? Why do the creators choose individual modes?	Layout, colour, and typography	“Omas” is highlighted. Outdoor and clothing are dark. “Ich liebe” and “Nachhauseweg” are highlighted.
		Text	References to public safety. It does not denote what is dangerous. However, it may be reminiscent of sexual assaulters committed by migrants (e.g. 2015-16 New Year’s Eve sexual assaults in Germany).
	Cross-modal analysis: What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Image	References to public safety. A policeman casually calls grandmothers. It is unclear why AfD uses “grandmas” as a representative example of citizens. One leaflet states that “60% of women in Germany regularly avoid certain places, streets or parks for fear of crime,” and “the high proportion of foreigners in serious violent crimes is also striking.” Outside: daytime park (Green background plus the word Park). The middle-aged white male uniformed police officer is watching over something behind the camera. Outside: night view. The bright background suggests that the place is urban. A young white woman anxiously looks behind her. She is wearing dark coloured clothing. The season may be winter.

4	Who is the target group?	People (women) who perceive an increased crime risk in public spaces such as parks.	People (women) who are anxious about going out at night.
	Framing: How is the issue framed?	These two posters indirectly frame asylum and immigration issues by securitisation.	
5	Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised?	N/A	The 2015-16 New Year's Eve sexual assaults: an important turning point of the welcoming culture.
	Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean?	N/A	The 2015-16 New Year's Eve sexual assaults.
	Othering: Who is "us" and who are "others"?	The contrast between "Omas (Bürger)" and "Verbrecher (Kriminelle)".	N/A
2021 Facebook posts		Post G and M indicate that criminals mix among migrants and refugees.	Post M: "Shocking! In NRW alone: One gang rape every three days!" The surprised face of a woman with hand over mouth. Colour reversed.
2017 posters		Poster j indicates that criminals mix among migrants and refugees.	

Phases and Sub-questions		Poster 6	Poster 7
2	Which issue is it relevant to?	Asylum, immigration	Asylum, immigration
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used? Why do the creators choose individual modes?	Layout, colour, and typography	"Leitkultur" is highlighted.
		Text	The female protagonist is a second-generation immigrant. She has an immigrant background but respects Leitkultur. It implies that AfD is not xenophobic or anti-immigration. AfD only allows immigrants who adapt and assimilate to the German Leitkultur.
	Cross-modal analysis:		"Deutschland" is highlighted. Germany First. The poster does not specify what the problem is. It says importing issue. The topic can be related to asylum and immigration.

	What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Image	Inside: inside the house. The young white woman is looking at the camera. Her facial expression is proud, and she has her arms crossed.	Outside: daytime, in front of a building with lots of not-artistic graffiti (an unsafe area). A middle-aged man is looking at the camera, arms crossed.
4	Who is the target group?		People having immigrant backgrounds and following the German Leitkultur. Patriotically-minded migrants.	Germany-First people. Anti-immigration.
	Framing: How is the issue framed?		The immigration issue is framed from the perspective of a second-generation immigrant who respects Leitkultur.	The asylum issue is framed by securitisation from the Germany-First perspective.
5	Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised?		Friedrich Merz (CDU) first used Leitkultur to criticise the then pro-immigrant SPD government in the early 2000s. Problems of parallel societies.	US President Donald Trump’s catchphrase “America First”. Trump conducted several anti-immigration policies in the US.
	Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean?		Taking into account that the white woman is used, Poster 6 suggests that no heterogeneity of appearance is desired.	Graffiti makes the area look unsafe. The poster suggests that accepting refugees and migrants will cause more problems for Germany.
	Othering: Who is “us” and who are “others”?		N/A	The contrast between Germany and the world.
2021 Facebook posts			No depiction of migrants or people with migrant backgrounds living inside Germany.	Although seven Facebook posts deal with the issue of Afghanistan, no poster does. As the issue only came up in August 2021, the posters could not reflect it.
2017 posters			No depiction of migrants or people with migrant backgrounds living inside Germany. Poster e includes discourses emphasising pedigree.	Boat migrants on Posters j and k: The backlighting deprives their facial expression, which dehumanises and demonises them.

Phases and Sub-questions		Poster 8	Poster 9	Poster 10
2	Which issue is it relevant to?	Economy, labour	Economy, labour	Economy, labour
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used?	Layout, colour, and typography	“Verliert” and “seinen Job nach China?” are highlighted.	“Solo-Selbstständig” is highlighted.
	Why do the creators choose individual modes?	Text	A blue-collar worker seems to be lamenting that his job might be lost to China and implies that politicians do not share his fears.	A solo self-employed woman mentions that Germany (the government) is neglecting the self-employed and entrepreneurs.
	Cross-modal analysis: What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Image	The helmeted man in blue work clothes is staring into the distance at work. He is in the middle of some kind of work/operation.	Inside: workroom. The white woman is looking at the camera. Her facial expression is serious. She is in the middle of operating a computer.
4	Who is the target group?	Blue-collar workers	Solo self-employed people	Employees or employers of SMEs
	Framing: How is the issue framed?	The posters depict the relatively low-paid or precarious workers’ perspective on economic and labour issues.		
5	Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised?	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean?	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Othring: Who is “us” and who are “others”?	The contrast between politicians (elite) and blue-collar workers.	The contrast between the state and solo self-employed persons.	The contrast between big international companies and domestic SMEs.

2021 Facebook posts	Post Y develops the discourse that climate protection may lead to job losses by citing IG Metall.
2017 posters	N/A

Phases and Sub-questions		Poster 11	Poster 12	Poster 13	
2	Which issue is it relevant to?	Economy, labour, and environment	Environment, energy	Environment, energy	
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used?	Layout, colour, and typography	Sunlight illuminates the pasture, and the overall impression is bright. “Berlin”, Mist”, and “Vieh” are highlighted.	“Tempolimit für grüne Verbote!” is highlighted.	The overcast grey sky. “Deutschland ein Experiment?” is highlighted.
	Why do the creators choose individual modes?	Text	A farmer man is unsatisfied with environmental obligations that impose financial burdens on farmers, most of which are issued by the government in Berlin. His opinion is that the capital pollutes the environment more than his agriculture.	The poster looks like a dog making a statement. The dog is against restrictions on (car) travel for environmental protection.	The impression is that renewable energy development (experiments) for environmental protection is being carried out without consent in rural communities. Electricity consumption is usually higher in urban areas, contrasting urban and rural areas.
	Cross-modal analysis: What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Image	Daytime pasture. Three cows, a girl and the farmer man wearing a hat. The man has his hands on his waist and looks at the girl. No facial expression is visible.	The Yorkshire terrier is peeking out of a car window, the only animal photographed on the 2021 posters. The dog’s fur suggests that the car is running. This image expresses driving more enjoyable and comfortable.	Outside: wind turbines line a grassy field. A person stands looking at them. No facial expression is visible. The location of the wind turbines is mostly in rural areas, so those populations suffer more from their presence.
4	Who is the target group?	Farmers	People who prioritise free mobility over environmental protection.	People who feel uncomfortable, excessive or harmful to renewable	

				energy policies.
	Framing: How is the issue framed?	The economic and environmental issues are framed from the viewpoint of the low-paid and rural people.	The policies for environmental protection are framed by freedom of mobility.	The policies for environmental protection are framed from the viewpoint of rural people.
5	Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised?	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean?	The poster implies that the protagonist opposes environmental measures that impose burdens on farmers, most of which are issued by the Berlin government.	N/A	The overcast grey sky gives the man's back a melancholy look. This poster may ironically imply that installing wind turbines for environmental protection destroys the environment.
	Othering: Who is "us" and who are "others"?	The contrast between Berlin and rural areas, politicians and farmers.	N/A	The contrast between urban and rural areas.
2021 Facebook posts		Post Y develops the discourse that climate protection may lead to job losses by citing IG Metall.		
2017 posters		N/A	Animals: On Poster h, a pig is used in the context of pork, which would seem cruel and creepy. Poster i depicts four black vultures monitoring the border.	N/A

Phases and Sub-questions		Poster 14	Poster 15
2	Which issue is it relevant to?	Environment, energy	Freedom of speech on the Internet
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols	Layout, colour, and typography	All letters are marked in the same size. "Konzerne" and "sagen darf?" are highlighted.

	and keywords are used? Why do the creators choose individual modes?	Text	Only this poster uses the name of a specific person: Greta Thunberg, a Swedish environmental activist. The rhyme of Creta and Greta will likely leave a lasting impression on the viewer.	“Konzerne” are possibly social media mega-companies like Meta and Twitter. The former government enforced the NetzDG in 2017, demanding the mega-platforms remove all illegal content.
	Cross-modal analysis: What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Image	A white girl by the window stares at the sky with an anxious and sad expression. The rain is like her tears. By portraying the content as the genuine question of the girl, it is less radical but, at the same time, opposes environmental protection as climate panic.	Outside: in the city during the daytime. A young white male is touching earphones and staring upwards.
4	Who is the target group?		People who prioritise freedom of mobility over environmental protection.	People who are uncomfortable with the NetzDG and feel it is censorship.
	Framing: How is the issue framed?		The policies for environmental protection are framed by freedom of mobility.	Social media regulation is framed by free speech.
5	Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised?		Greta’s sailing across the Atlantic in 2019	The NetzDG in 2018
	Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean?		The rain is like the girl’s tears. Greta = climate change hysteria	N/A
	Othering: Who is “us” and who are “others”?		N/A	The contrast between individuals and mega-corporations like Meta (Facebook, Instagram) and Twitter.
2021 Facebook posts			Post Y develops the discourse that climate protection may lead to job losses by citing IG Metall.	N/A
2017 posters			N/A	N/A

Phases and Sub-questions		Poster 16	Poster 17
2	Which issue is it relevant to?	Gender, family, children	Gender, family, children
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used? Why do the creators choose individual modes?	Layout, colour, and typography	“Mutter” is highlighted.
		Text	“Gender-Gaga” means gender equality measures are wrong, crazy or exaggerated. A woman on the poster is a mother and emphasises that she is not a “birthing parent”.
	Cross-modal analysis: What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Image	Outside: maybe a daytime park. The white woman holds and smiles at a baby.
4	Who is the target group?	Conservative or homophobic people.	Supporters of traditional structures. Young families.
	Framing: How is the issue framed?	The use of language (<i>Leitkultur</i>) frames gender diversity.	Family is framed by conventional structures.
5	Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised?	N/A	N/A
	Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean?	“Mother” connotes traditional gender roles: the mother is at home with the children while the father works outside.	AfD supports only families with conventional structures and does not consider transgender families.
	Othering: Who is “us” and who are “others”?	The traditional term “mother” is contrasted with the gender-neutral language “birthing parent”. Conservatives are us,	N/A

		and LGBT+ people and their allies are others.	
2021 Facebook posts		Post R explains German language “is being threatened and destroyed in many ways - by gender mania, by an excess of Anglicisms, by the decline in standards caused by left-wing education policies.”	Posters and posts depicting families and children are always in subdued colour tones and do not appear radical; however, the commitment to traditional family structures is palpable.
2017 posters		N/A	

Phases and Sub-questions		Poster 18	Poster 19
2	Which issue is it relevant to?	Pensions	Pensions
3	Intra-modal analysis: What are the features of each mode? What symbols and keywords are used? Why do the creators choose individual modes? Cross-modal analysis: What meanings are created through the interaction of multiple modes? What intentions are thought to be contained behind them?	Layout, colour, and typography Text Image	The overcast grey sky. “Aber nicht mit der ganzen Welt.” is highlighted. Older protagonists oppose the pension budget used for foreign issues or by “non-Germans” in Germany. The term border is used. Outside: daytime, in the city. Back view of the older man sitting on a bench. He is looking down. No facial expression is visible.
		Outside: In front of a lake, cloudy sky. Back view of the woman and man, possibly an elderly couple, leaning shoulder to shoulder. No facial expression is visible.	Outside: daytime, in the city. Back view of the older man sitting on a bench. He is looking down. No facial expression is visible.
4	Who is the target group?	Elderly or pensioners who are at risk from poverty in particular.	

	Framing: How is the issue framed?	The framing is that pensions are threatened by wasteful spending on foreign issues.	The framing is that pensions are threatened by wasteful spending on foreign issues.
5	Historicity: What historical events are being evoked and recontextualised?	N/A	N/A
	Metaphor: What metaphors are thought to be included? What do they mean?	The darker tones of the cloudy grey sky give a sense of melancholy.	The darker tones of the city and clothing give a sense of melancholy.
	Othering: Who is “us” and who are “others”?	The terms “borders” on the light blue bands emphasise the contrast between Germany and the rest of the world, giving the impression of the Germany First stance.	
2021 Facebook posts		Post C uses the image of the blue-collar man on Poster 8, and the text says, “Pension only at 70?” The 2021 poster is aimed at pensioners, while the Facebook post targets younger people who will receive pensions in the future.	
2017 posters		No poster uses the word “pension”; however, there were two posters relating to the welfare system: Posters i and k. The former emphasises “borders” verbally and visually. The latter is in English, targeting non-German speakers, namely immigrants or asylum-seekers. The demonisation of them as social welfare abusers can be read from the images as well.	

Appendix 2. Two issue posters *without* images on the Afghanistan issue¹⁸¹



¹⁸¹ The left-side poster says, "Kassel, Cologne or Constance can no longer tolerate Kabul. Now: Stop migration from Afghanistan!" The right-side says, "Help the Afghans. But in their homeland! Now: Stop migration from Afghanistan!"