



Department of Political Science

**‘A Horseshoe in Crisis’ –
To what extent do German populist far-right and far-left
parties converge in times of crises?**

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	6
Acknowledgements.....	7
List of Abbreviations.....	9
1. Introduction.....	10
- 1.1 Related Works.....	12
2. Theoretical Framework.....	14
- 2.1 Populism.....	14
- 2.1.1 Understanding Populism.....	14
- 2.1.2 Democracy in Populism.....	17
- 2.1.3 The Charismatic Leader.....	19
- 2.2 Crisis.....	21
- 2.2.1 Concept Crisis.....	21
- 2.2.2 Crisis in Populism.....	23
- 2.2.3 Media and Protectionism.....	25
- 2.3 Horseshoe Theory & Right/Left Wing Populism	28
- 2.3.1 ‘Theory’.....	28
- 2.3.2 Similarities.....	29
- 2.3.3 Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary.....	32
3. Methodology.....	34
- 3.1 Research Design.....	34
- 3.1.1 Research Question & Variables.....	34
- 3.1.2 Hypothesis.....	36
- 3.1.3 Reliability & Validity.....	37
- 3.2 Data.....	39
- 3.2.1 Case Selection.....	39
- 3.2.2 Defining the Subjects: Far-Right & Far-Left Parties.....	42
- 3.2.3 Data Collection.....	47
- 3.3 Analysis.....	51
- 3.3.1 Stance Analysis.....	51
- 3.3.2 Coding.....	53

- 3.4 Results.....58

- 3.4.1 Annotation Category Coding58
- 3.4.2 Stance Analysis Coding61
- 3.4.3 Limitations.....67

4. Conclusion69

5. Bibliography & Appendices72

Abstract

As the world began seeing light at the end of the tunnel with lockdowns ending and a global recovery in sight, Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 catapulting the world into the next crisis sending shockwaves worldwide. The war crimes committed in Ukraine, have forced the European states to act internationally, as well as domestically. Considering the presence of such crises, this paper provides an insight into the strategies and policies national populist parties adopt. In doing so, this study focuses on the German populist far-right party AfD and populist far-left party Die Linke, comparatively measuring their agreement on a variety of policy topics surrounding the 2022 Ukraine War and comparing it to those of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. A comprehensive theoretical framework discusses the main concepts, and the objectives of this study based on previous literature. The collected data consists of segments of parliamentary speeches members of the German parliament across 17 to 33 months. The methodology comprises of 3 instruments including a stance analysis of speech as primary method. The use of manifestos from the MARPOR database serve the measurement of the concept populism and an analysis of legislative roll call votes as an additional step to identify consistency between stances from speeches and stances from legislative voting. While this study expected causation between the presence of crises and populist party stance convergence, findings were limited to minor similarities, displaying insufficient convergence across both crises. The paper nonetheless contributes to a wider understanding of populism's relationship to crises and the strategies it warrants for populist parties to employ in times of societal turmoil.

Keywords: convergence, crisis, populism, stance analysis, Ukraine War, Covid-19

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List of Abbreviations

2G/3G – Geimpft, Getestet, Genesen (*Vaccinated, Tested, Recovered*)

AI – Artificial Intelligence

AfD – Alternative für Deutschland

CDU – Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands

CI – Convergence Instance

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

CSU - Christlich-Soziale Union

DIP - Dokumentations- und Informationssystem für Parlamentarische Vorgänge

DKP – Deutsche Kommunistische Partei

EU - European Union

FDP - Freie Demokratische Partei

GDR – German Democratic Republic

MARPOR - Manifesto Research on Political Representation

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NLP – Natural Language Processing

SED – Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands

SPD - Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands

SVM – Support Vector Machines

VAT – Value Added Tax

WHO – World Health Organization

UK – United Kingdom

US/USA – United States of America

Introduction

Upon proceeding through this text, readers will encounter a distributed series of quotes, tagged at the beginning of each section, from political figures and campaigns addressing the people. Moreover, the majority of these quotes were expressed in times of acute transformation, where every message has the power to either subdue or antagonise a population. Presumably, the intentions may vary, yet the ultimate goal is for readers to remember what the quote said and what it meant. The quotes in this paper cover a range of political ideologies, all over the spectrum, and yet the possibility of all claiming the same objective pertains. Politics that favour the ordinary people and a sole belligerent as the evil to protect the people from. And readers may then find themselves looking at something resembling a quote from a populist. Certainly not all of them are, but most certainly all of them could be. And despite the enormous selection of populism literature available, it often appears that a vague assessment such as that is the only understanding to be certain of. While the term itself polarises, its meaning only becomes tangible when in direct confrontation with it, and even then one realises that a closer look, as well as a step back may be necessary in grasping this concept. Perhaps a step back results in realising that populism is complemented by democratic regimes and democratic mobilisation (Urbini, 2019). A closer look on the other hand will shed light on the various interpretations it has encompassed historically.

In examining past literature on populism, authors in the past referred to descriptions such as chameleonic, shapeshifter and a syndrome resembling the fluidity of the weather when discussing the term (Priester, 2008) (Kollberg, 2023). Despite these suggestive characteristics, this study comprises of two parties that engage with the political environment in a specific populist manner. Knowing this populist manner has fascinated authors for its lack of uniformity, the objective of this study is to identify the extent to which both populist parties AfD and Die Linke share similar stances under crisis conditions across various policy fields. Most importantly, both parties are as little alike as possible, one from the far-left and one from the far-right and thus unlikely candidates for significant convergence on stance. And despite that, this study will attempt to identify whether both parties and their affinity for a populist strategy unites their approach in times of crises.

Resembling populism in that aspect, in confrontation, or surrounded by it, a crisis is a highly publicised, everyday term, thus enabling a reasonable public conception of what it encompasses. But how do you define it? Numerous interpretations throughout this text, similarly to puzzle pieces, help consolidate what is known so far, although in this context, the following definition may be particularly appropriate; ‘a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions’, by Rosenthal et al. (1989) as cited in Boin et al. (2009 p. 2). And as this study examines crises on a global scale, of which the causes appear less tangible for the ordinary person, populist parties seek to exploit these circumstances. Due to an intervention as such being made under conditions of urgency and uncertainty, the goal is to further capitalise on potential negative consequences of the intervention and blame those in power. This is achieved by populism’s fundamental people-centric world view, where the ordinary person is threatened by the oppressive and corrupt practices of the elite (Mudde, 2004). As the ‘ordinary person’ has no defined set of characteristics in populism, neither does a person belonging to the elite (Brubaker, 2017). Yet the soul of populism comprises of a never-ending dichotomy between the ‘good’ ordinary people and the elite. Because without the presence of this conflict, populism lacks its protectionist foundation and a vital instrument of mobilisation. Whether a crisis is financial, political or environmental, populists have the propensity to identify and frame whoever necessary as a member of the elite, in order to suit a narrative. While their pursued policies are claimed to benefit the wellbeing of the people, they are simultaneously aimed against the elite group of people that threaten the core element of populism. In doing so, it also utilises a populist style of communication that plays an immense role in mobilising and transforming the environment favourable to a populist strategy.

With the illustration of this framework, this dissertation produces a comparison of two polar-opposite populist parties Die Linke and the AfD. This is to gain a novel insight into the extent a far-right and a far-left party that share a populist strategy and populist ideas, display consistent convergence of stance on policies under crisis conditions. These conditions are provided by two case studies emblematic of recent global crises, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, resulting in the 2022 Ukraine War. Measuring convergence across two time periods marked by a health crisis and a security crisis, will result in the answer to this study’s central question. Simultaneously, the posed hypothesis that ‘*in the presence of global crises, populist parties AfD and Die Linke express stance convergence in their parliamentary*

speech' will be tested. The methodology applied to this study includes a textual stance analysis of parliamentary speeches made by members of the German parliament of their respective parties relevant to this study. Upon concluding this study, the following sections will have provided a valuable insight into the current state of research on populism and its relationship to crises, particularly in context of the recent crises included as case studies. Moreover that it opens up further avenues for future research into fascinating tools of political analysis. And finally, that it evokes an enhanced political awareness of the positions that parties stand for in parliament. The following content of this text is divided into the following chapters: (1) a theoretical framework where the main concepts of this study are comprehensively explained by means of past literature to discuss their significance to the study, (2) the methodology chapter where the applied method in the research process is thoroughly laid out, including the findings of the analysis, (3) the conclusion where the implications of the research process and the results of the study are discussed, as well as the academic and societal contributions, (4) bibliography and appendices which includes a complete list of referenced work and appendices.

Related works on stance analysis

Although stance analysis is not a recently discovered scientific tool, the classification of stance purely and independent of sentiment related measurement units is still underexplored, thus related works from a purely technical aspect are limited. Going with Burnham's definition, stance must be understood as an expression of 'how an individual would answer a proposition' (2024, p. 3). The application of this technique can be observed in a variety of alternatives for companies conducting market research to academia of NLP studies and computer science. As per Abercrombie and Batista-Navarro (2020) these have diffused into different avenues of opinion-mining which share similarities to this study in its approach including Laver et al. (2003), Baturu et al. (2017), Frid-Nielsen (2018) and Owen (2006). These authors sought the extraction of data via debate speeches and voting labels to discover the policy positions of speaker and parties. Abercrombie & Batista-Navarro (2018a) combined both approaches comparatively, similarly to this dissertation, utilising parliamentary transcripts in measuring the polarity of opinions. Both authors have published extensive work in the field of NLP, while concentrating on large textual data from primarily UK parliamentary debate motions and speeches using SVMs (2018b; 2019). Considering large corpus sizes, Kollberg (2023) compiled European Parliament speeches between 1999 and 2016 using data from legislative discourse only to measure populist rhetoric and how it affects voters. Proksch & Slapin (2010) similarly applied an analysis of European Parliament speeches between 1999 and 2004,

however without the usage of SVMs and solely with the help of the textual analysis programme Wordfish by measuring the frequency of keywords.

Within the realm of policy analysis, testing for convergence has been an established task within academia. Distinct from this study however, none of the tests conducted in prior research seeks for convergence between two parties within the same state. They rather focus on cross-national comparisons between two states such as the UK and US (Greener, 2002) and the US and Canada (Howlett, 2000) or regional comparisons such as the OECD states (Sanz & Velázquez, 2003) (Montanari, 2001), or EU states (Hill, 1997) (Hackl, 2001) with all limited to just one policy field (Heichel et al., 2005). While their papers resemble this study methodologically, their purpose is not aimed at elaborating social phenomena or specific cases for which the detection of convergence is used for. Research applying stance detection or at minimum an analysis of policy convergence for two parties comparatively is highly limited with the exception of Anastasia Bersenev (2022). The author similarly focused on anti-establishment parties in Germany, using both AfD and Die Linke as subjects for their study, and attempting to dissect their equally present pro-Russian sentiments. The employed method also utilises parliamentary speeches and election manifestos, in the analysis of textual data in relation to external events and their impact on the parties' policy positions. Although the emphasis in Bersenev's paper does not concentrate on the conditions caused by the war, the author detected the parties' stance on Russia related topics as favourable or unfavourable and whether these result in ideological or strategic affiliation. Their paper therefore resembles this study as it explores the stance agreement of two politically distant parties in relation to external stimuli.

Theoretical Framework

Populism

‘Wir sind das Volk’ – ‘We are the people’ (East Germans, 1989/1990, Anti-government chant)¹

Understanding Populism

The term populism presents itself as the supreme concept representing politics for ‘the people’ and their ‘general will’, aimed against the main antagonist in the form of the ‘elite’ (Maher et al. 2022). The extraordinary weight behind its definition has led to the emergence of a vast range of interpretations that authors decomposed through literature, or empirically by emerging populist movements around the world, particularly over the last decade. The current state of literature is within mutual agreement regarding the term ‘populist’ itself as an overly ambiguous term, and in fact, a term rarely claimed by individuals or movements themselves (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). Instead, it rather often finds itself instrumentalised with the intent to demonize individuals and campaigns, while the term itself avoids concrete and inarguable definitions surrounding its meaning (Urbinati, 2019). Throughout the examined literature, the consensus regarding its lack of a single universal understanding has been widely shared, leading to the emergence of subcategories and new classifications of the term. Matthijs Rooduijn (2014) applies this approach in his literature with the goal of finding a lowest common denominator among the published definitions. In doing so, the researcher applies the Sartorian approach of a phenomenon requiring a definite set of characteristics in order to classify it as a definition (Sartori, 1970). Rooduijn’s key characteristics constitute of (1) people-centrism as main emphasis for populist actors, (2) criticism towards the elite, (3) conception of the people as a homogenous entity; and (4) proclaiming the presence of a crisis (Rooduijn, 2014). Along all the lines of populist understanding, his characteristics reflect a wide-ranging consensus in conceptualising this loosely understood term. Upon studying past literature, an emphasis on the named individual characteristics frequently takes place, where they contribute

¹ Bundesregierung. (n.d.). „Wir sind das Volk“: Die Friedliche Revolution 1989/90. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/deutsche-einheit/wir-sind-das-volk-469010>

towards a general definition. Whereas Rooduijn's (2014) interpretation represents an interdependent web of key features. The centrality of 'the people' as main actor cannot exist without its role as a homogenous entity within the populist narrative and vice versa. Equally, the inherent hostility towards the elite cannot exist without the rhetoric and propagation of a crisis. One may therefore choose this definition as a decisive starting point in defining populism, as its qualities highlight the regularity of specific populist properties.

Yet while the approach of a conceptual subclassification provides a more simplified view on populism, the conceptual core of any ideology and its understanding is complemented by the presence of substantial empirical evidence. In the case of populism, Stanley (2008) emphasises its unique nature, as a consequence due to the absence of 'institutional elements indicating a common purpose or unity amongst populists: there is no Populist International; no canon of key populist texts or calendar of significant moments; and the icons of populism are of local rather than universal appeal' (Stanley, 2008, p. 100). However, this has certainly changed since Stanley's 2008 text, with populist actors increasingly cooperating across borders and institutions such as the European Parliament. Moreover, his description of populism's protean nature makes for an accurate proponent of Cas Mudde's (2004) widely accepted breakdown of the concept as a 'thin-centred ideology'. While lacking a 'thick centre' comprised of core values and norms, refined, and replicated universally for decades, populism attaches itself to established ideologies such as liberalism or socialism which possess such properties (Mudde, 2004). This requirement fundamentally defines where a populist actor may be located or is perceived to be on the left/right political spectrum, based on which established ideology it is matched with (Singh, 2021). And while it may harm populism's reputation as a standalone ideology, its weakness may also be its greatest strength, as its versatility and attachment to various narratives permits its survival, allowing itself to be instrumentalised by any political movement along the spectrum (Roberts, 1995).

As a moralistic rather than a programmatic construct, the dichotomy between the 'good' people and the 'bad' elite remains constant, but the various interpretations of either take place locally (Mudde, 2004) (Stanley, 2008). Russian populism of the nineteenth century opposed capitalism, African populism was carried out by government leaders glorifying the ordinary individual, Latin American populism originated rurally, aimed at elites after economic depression (Olivas Osuna, 2021). The empirical evidence underscores that the actors that make 'the people' and 'the elite' are never derived from a fixed set of characteristics or stereotype.

Their inherently antagonistic relationship is illustrated by a symbolic ‘us against them’ depiction, simplifying the populist world view of societies (Panizza, 2005). However, this symbolic construction relies heavily on the confrontation aspect alone and consequentially allows populists to choose which specific juxtaposition fits their anti-elitism agenda (Verbeek & Wojczewski, 2023). The one certainty available related to the elite, is that their identity is dependent on context, whether an economic, cultural, legal, media or political elite, both poles of the concept disperse equally ambiguous understandings among scholars (Rooduijn, 2014). Complemented by Oscar Reyes’ take, who in reference to the identity of the elite and the people states that the mere act of giving a name for one or the other automatically establishes its meaning (2005). Moreover, next to the people and elite dichotomy, researchers are faced with a conceptual dichotomy between what is unknown in theory and what is thought to be known in reality.

In defining populism, its ambiguity led Paul Taggart (2003) to replace the term ‘people’ with ‘the heartland’, as he outlines the absence of a single unified class of people that populism seeks to address with the former. Resembling an ‘imagined community’ constructed to collectively face the common enemy, Taggart used ‘the heartland’ instead, in illustrating the people not as unimportant, but rather as occupants of an ideological homebase. The heartland characterises populist values of simplicity, homogeneity of its inhabitants, and the juxtaposition of the people to the elite (Taggart, 2003) (Stanley, 2008). The author’s illustration not only showcases populism’s weak reputation as a standalone ideology, but it also highlights the necessity to attach itself to thicker-centred ideologies to strengthen its case for ‘the people’s’ fight against the elite (Verbeek & Wojczewski, 2023). Brubaker (2017) suggests further variety of the term, by breaking it into three central meanings, to present how the usage of ‘the people’ is decisive in the categorisation of the movement. He states that if spoken in the name of ‘little people’ versus ‘those on top’, people are faced with redistributive politics, if it’s the ‘sovereign people’ against ‘ruling elites’ it would imply re-democratizing politics and if its ‘bounded and distinct people’ against ‘threatening outside groups’, it would imply ethnically nationalising politics (2017, p. 359). Thus, regardless of a single unified base with homogenous ambitions as Taggart depicted it, or Brubaker’s context terminology that defines it. ‘The people’ as the heart of populism remains open to interpretation and always in conflict against a common enemy (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017)

Democracy in Populism

As the literature suggests, populism may not exist without the presence of specific conditions. The homogeneity of the people, a common enemy, the conflict between both and the impression of an existing crises (Rooduijn, 2016). Which may not unequivocally guarantee its presence, but all contribute to an improved recognition of populism. Its chameleonic nature describes its ability to appeal to parties on either side of the spectrum, similarly its ability to adjust and conform to context dependent situations, as well as the '*volonté générale*', the general will of the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013) (Mudde, 2007). Although the literature agrees on populism's complementary properties to democracy as 'a democratising force' (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 18) (Urbinati, 2019), Panizza argues that populism's flawed relationship with democracy needs to be considered (2005). While Mudde (2004) regards the 'general will' as the third core concept of populism (next to the people and the elite), Panizza notes that the survival of democracy under populism requires the recognition, that the general will of all the people can never fully be enacted, and that full sovereignty of the people could therefore only prevail provisionally (2005). Moreover, the continued denial of heterogeneity and support for a motion of a uniform aspiration that covers all people would near an authoritarian society (Panizza, 2005) (Mudde, 2004).

In contrast, Urbinati (2019) praises it as 'democracy at its best', due to the advocacy for a collective will that is built upon direct mobilisation and the representation of the underrepresented by means of discursive devices (p. 117). This stance also aligns with Kriesi (2020) who links populism to inadequate solutions to frustrated demands for increased responsiveness. These demands originate as a consequence of people who view their national democracies more critically than prior to a crisis such as The Great Recession and the Migrant Crisis (Kriesi, 2020). Pierre Rosanvallon (2006) recognises democracy's significance, but paints it in a far more conflicting light, especially considering Urbinati's (2019) rather positive reflection. His emphasis lies on the perversion of democratic values and the totalitarian disguises it embodies. Rosanvallon's take focuses more on what populism poses itself as to achieve its goals, democratic or not, which in itself should be considered 'counter-democratic' (Rosanvallon, 2006) (Riedel, 2008). Moreover, with a number of authors referring to populism as a form of 'political expression' Riedel interprets Rosanvallon's definition as 'a form of political expression in which the democratic project allows itself to be absorbed and fully 'vampirized' by counter democracy' (2008, p. 293).

While most literature avoids such drastic assessments of this concept, populism's conceptual and practical limitations in context of democracy are frequently addressed. Populism at its core opposes elitism but does so equally to pluralism. The general will of the 'silent majority' is homogenous and thus collectively hostile towards the key institutions of both liberal and constitutional democracies that represent greed before unity (Mudde, 2004, p. 557). It can be argued for that populism seeks the most direct method of democracy to achieve its goals and as a consequence takes a detour avoiding the complex consensus-seeking institutions of politics (Rooduijn, 2014). This is further acknowledged by Taggart (2000) who underlines the distrust, populist movements have against representative institutions such as interest groups and parties, which in light of increasing European integration and globalisation are less representative of the populists' domestic voter bases. He continues to highlight how this explains why a new wave of populists have been able to root relatively convincingly, or at least are met with suitable preconditions in former communist or central and eastern European states. In such societies, due to their history of communist isolation and past romanticism, rejection for institutionalism and supranational organisations goes hand in hand with populist rhetoric existing 'in the guise of ethnic nationalism and ex-communists' (Taggart, 2004, p. 278). This serves as another example of populism's ability to match up with any given ideology, as much as it is a necessity, as a thin-centred ideology, to gain a foothold within a variety of different cultures.

When explaining populism's undemocratic 'guise' or 'appearance' one must dive further into an argument made by Maher et al. (2022), whose study concluded with populism having a profound appeal due to its associated feelings of nostalgia. These complement the populism's critique towards the grand structure of the entire political system and the direction it is heading in the future (Maher et al., 2022). Hawkins et al. (2017) refines this argument, in reference to Ernesto Laclau, naming industrialisation as the overarching key condition that permits and perpetuates populism, for its effects on society. He states that it does so by introducing new identities in competition with the working class, by reshaping and modernizing the familiar ways they engaged with their institutions in the past. Consequently, this reshuffling of social relations as to how individuals interact with their state is broken down, with power being gentrified from local services such as community centres, town councils or local businesses, to detached and overly bureaucratic institutions (Hawkins et al., 2017). With this shift in power dynamics, populism demands the radical questioning of all existing features of a democratic system (Urbinati, 2019). It seeks to fill the gap of the underrepresented 'silent majority', and if

necessary, as Riedel (2008, p. 293) put it, by means of coercion and undemocratic methods to match ‘the undemocratic tendencies of technocracy and globalisation’.

The Charismatic Leader

In forming an understanding of populism and its definition, one may encounter personifications that embody the meaning and the campaign it stimulates. As a key component of many scholars’ conception of populism, the figure of the single charismatic leader of a populist movement cannot be ignored. Especially when considering the wide range of literature available containing empirical analyses on these leaders, particularly recently with modern figures such as Donald Trump and Viktor Orban, or classic ones such as Hugo Chavez. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) describe the conventional populist charismatic leader as an individual with strengths in effective mobilisation, unrelated to the elite and connected to the people. Urbinati (2019) highlights the profoundness of the charismatic leader as a sole beacon for hope, that exploits the troubles of people to mobilise their unified will. Taggart’s (2000) interpretation further confirms this by noting that the great presence of the single leader often symbolises what a populist movement relies on. Yet the opinions diverge regarding the restrictions, or lack of restrictions that a single charismatic leader provides a movement with.

The weight of the movement on the leader’s sole shoulders can create highly sensitive situations, where their popularity may be catapulted to a point of irreplaceability (Albertazzi, 2006). They pose as the embodiment of the people’s general will and the voice of the heartland, but a strongly personalised leadership as the face of the campaign, often forces the movement’s longevity to run parallel to that of its leader (Albertazzi, 2006) (Taggart, 2000). The populist leader thus requires a stable connection to their base and must do so by choosing particular channels of communication, that propels them further from the elite and closer to the people (Stanley, 2008). The mainstream media is often received by populists as a highly institutionalised instrument of the elite and a medium to further divide to society. Weyland (2016) in contrary argues as far as the mass media actually contributing largely to populist’s rejection of intermediation. Although Mudde (2004) references Joerg Haider by highlighting the relationship between populists and the media as mutually beneficial. The spectacular and taboo-breaking nature of their communication style creates the profound drive behind the significant mobilisation effect populist leaders tend to generate (Mudde, 2004). The relationship, as several authors describe as direct and lacking intermediaries, requires a form of communication, representing those attributes, as well as addressing their concerns in the

utmost unfiltered fashion as possible. Social media has proven to be the ideal medium for populists facilitating ‘simplified, unilateral, and antagonistic forms of communication’ (Caiani & Graziano, 2019, p. 1150). Albertazzi (2006) whose paper covered the populist party of the Italian Lega dei Ticinesi, included a statement by party leader Giuliano Bignasca in 2004 where he offered anyone who sympathises with his party and wishes to comment on its direction is free to ‘knock at his door’. Interestingly, neither AfD nor Die Linke have relied on the qualities of a sole charismatic leader for populist momentum. While qualities such as ‘collective leadership and internal democracy’ are traditionally properties of leftist parties such as Die Linke or the Greens, the AfD has instead relied on its influential internal factions as catalysts for mobilisation (Heinze & Weisskircher, 2021, p. 264).

Crisis

*‘Wir schaffen das’ – ‘We can do this’ (Angela Merkel, CDU, 2015, Response to Refugee crisis)*²

Concept Crisis

It can be argued that crises present complementary traits to populism, through the anxiety and uncertainty they foster within a society. Finding an accurate and reliable definition for crises however is a more treacherous task. When discussing the media’s role in popularising populism, one may draw equal parallels to the media exacerbating our loose understanding of what a crisis truly represents. Although better understood in the context of the populist sphere, where Ernesto Laclau and Antonio Gramsci provide improved insights, Colin Hay (1996; 99) lays the foundation in producing a comprehensive illustration. In this definition, a crisis is a process of transformation, forced by an object requiring decisive intervention and a subject that must exercise it. Thus it can be seen as broadly speaking, a situation where concrete action can or must be taken, of which the subjectivity of its severity manifests a state of crisis through narrative (Hay, 1996). While this definition fulfils its role in attempting to cover the large and complex varieties of crises, the parameters of which it needs to fit into require further explanation. Koselleck and Richter (2006) emphasise on the crises’ importance of the transformation, which conventionally leads to the revelation of whether its symptoms are unique or recurring. It nonetheless has the ability to enforce changes as to how one perceives the world around us and the subsequent power to become ‘a structural signature of modernity’ (2006, p. 372).

In answering why decisive intervention needs to be taken, Claus Offe (1976) refers to fundamental structures of a system being questioned. Thus people are faced with a threat that endangers the ‘identity of a system’, which can be understood comparatively, as the events conventionally occurring in this system, resembling a state of normality and contrasting a state of crisis (Offe, 1976, p. 31) (Moffitt, 2016). Therefore, the existence of a threat, combined with the necessity of a decision to be made, even if it leads to inaction, is a decision prompted by this threat (Runciman, 2016). However, in defining the independent variable of the existence

² Heißler, J. (2020, August 31). „Wir schaffen das“: Fünf Jahre danach – Bilanz einer Kanzlerin. Tagesschau. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/merkel-wir-schaffen-das-101.html>

of a crisis, the researcher finds the definition by Rosenthal et al. (1989) cited in Boin et al. (2009 p. 2) most suitable, in which ‘a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions.’ Essentially this definition is particularly appropriate as it encompasses elements from Offe (1976), Hay (1996;99), Runciman (2016) and Moffitt (2016) by addressing the necessity for decisive intervention, the conditions under which the intervention is to be made and the aspects of society that are being questioned.

Moreover, it is difficult to define a crisis without addressing the interchangeable use of ‘failure’ and its role in the context of crisis. There is certainly a lack of explicit reference to the importance of failures, as Topper and Lagadec refer to it as a basic condition, stating that ‘crisis develops when risk control has failed’ (2013, p. 8). Moffitt (2015) highlights this, that when referring to populism, the authors claiming causation between populism and crises, more than often are in fact referring to failures. Making a clear distinction in which as Hay mentioned, a decisive action is only automatically required in a crisis and not failure, that is under the condition that the ‘failure becomes culturally or politically mediated and gains an important temporal dimension’ (1996, p. 197). Thus subjectiveness surrounding failure is not solely caused by a misuse of terminology. Rather because it comprises of ‘an accumulation of unresolved systemic contradictions’ that have grown systemically embedded, providing the ‘preconditions for perceived crisis’ (Bobba & Hubé, 2021, p. 3) (Hay, 1999, p. 324). They are exceptions to the routine existence of our social life, around which a ‘construction of crisis’ is then generated, prompting a response to the narrative of this construction (Hay, 1999). Paul t’Hart fundamentally argues that ‘those who are able to define what the crisis is all about also hold the key to defining the appropriate strategies for [its] resolution’ (1993, p. 41). And not solely limited to its solution, but rather our entire perception and how people interpret reactions towards crises, as the label of crisis alone has the ability to fill the vacuum of any ‘chronic and routine forms of economic disruption, trouble and insecurity’ (Brubaker, 2011, p. 96). This inevitably also influences the application of time parameters, as the marking of a start or end to a crisis is a highly ambiguous task, as the manner in which a crisis is experienced ultimately overrules its longevity and the effectiveness of proposed solutions (Runciman, 2016).

Crisis in Populism

Perceptions of crises are subjective and therefore, in terms of its relation to populism, one must consider the very crises populism emerges from. Gramsci (1971, p. 451) refers to a ‘crisis of authority’ or a ‘crisis of hegemony’ that can be used to explain the emergence of populist ideology. Where the hegemon has failed to maintain dominance in authority, it exercises coercion in response to the people seeking change, by no longer accepting the previous fundamental ideologies (Gramsci, 1971). Laclau’s crisis is a ‘crisis of representation’ which he claims, ‘is at the root of any populist, anti-institutional outburst’ (2005, p. 137). Both author’s crises are transformations that are set to provoke concrete demands for action, with systemic failures of state triggering loss of authority and its will to represent the people. These failures are then framed into crises and drivers for populist mobilisation. Since the connection to crises has taken shape, Laclau further highlights the importance of demands and how they shape the breeding ground for populism. Particularly, the core element ‘the people’ comes to fruition, as the systemic failures lead to requests, which transform into an accumulation of demands when unfulfilled by the hegemon, which one can refer back to the crisis of authority. This connection also exists to the crisis of representation, as the dichotomy of the elite and the people materialises when the hegemon loses its ability to acknowledge the demands individually and isolated from another. This consequentially establishes ‘equivalential relations’ among the individual demands, transforming into a unit of ‘popular demands’, of which the concept ‘the people’ is then created from (Laclau, 2005, p. 73-74).

Thus, the earlier to modern literature is within predominant agreement that populism and crises have benefited from the propagation of each other. Taggart considers crises a core characteristic of populism yet calling its essence only a ‘reaction to a sense of extreme crises’ (Taggart, 2000, p. 275). Riedel underlines the reactionary aspect, as its growth is a response to changes and challenges to society (2015). Several authors go significantly further in definitively stating that ‘populism thrives on crises’, acting as a precondition to sustain its societal relevance, let alone the eternal conflict of the unified people and the common enemy (Brubaker, 2017, p. 374) (Bobba & Hubé, 2021) (Kriesi, 2015). These interpretations imply that crises precede populism, yet they may even further rely on external factors such as the failure of institutions and a strong, personalistic style of leadership to capitalise on systemic weaknesses and mobilise the masses (Roberts, 1995).

The view, that populism's relationship with crises is merely reactionary or reliant is debatable, as Moffitt (2015; 2016) believes that it plays a profoundly internal role how populism polarises and performs crises. Claiming that crises are rarely a neutral event that populists utilise by chance, Moffitt proposes instead they 'perform and perpetuate a sense of crisis' (2015, p. 195). Taggart who despite calling populism a reaction, did in fact refer to it as a 'sense of crisis', matching Moffitt's emphasis and supporting his proposal to take distance from the objective view of crises and focus on its performative production by populists instead (2015; 2016) (Taggart, 2000, p. 275). One may consider it necessary to distinguish Moffitt's performance of crisis, to the theory of issue entrepreneurship, as both may involve parties catalysing specific issues neglected by mainstream parties, to highlight their fundamental differences to the status quo and mobilise the underrepresented (Hobolt & de Vries, 2012; 2015) (Bersenev, 2022). Despite their similarities, issue entrepreneurship disregards the elementary 'people against elite' dichotomy, which is imperative for drawing parallels to the performance of crises populism engages in. Which Moffitt (2016) recognises as the elementary step in crisis performance as 'identity failure', where the populists voice the failures of representation of ordinary people and failures of the elite. Regardless, the antagonism of good and bad remains focal in the propagation of crises for political gain. Moreover, although Hansen & Olsen (2022, p. 5) refer to them as 'populist issue entrepreneurs', they are merely referring to 'challenger parties', which in the literature refers to parties experiencing repeated electoral losses, or parties that have never been in power (de Vries & Hobolt, 2012) (Williams & Hunger, 2022). However, according to Brubaker (2021, p. 74) even when populist parties have held political office, they 'embraced the rhetoric of crisis and used it to justify emergency measures that have tightened their authoritarian grip on power'. Therefore, one should loosely associate issue entrepreneurship to populism and instead interpret it as a political instrument populists may avail of, as its purpose reflects the 'populist frame' (Hansen & Olsen, 2022, p. 16).

Stavrakakis et al., refer to Moffitt's take and divide it into two camps: crises being a 'triggering mechanism' (external) or a 'performative construction' (internal) (2017, p. 8). The latter categorisation has also gathered support from other authors, to remove crises as a preceding condition for populism. Caiani and Graziano's interpretation of the relationship, proposes that crises provide an ideal 'window of opportunity' for new opportunistic political actors to capitalise on the concerns of the citizens (2019, p. 1142), which takes a softer stance on the role of crises' in relation to populism. Furthermore, referring back to Rooduijns (2014) characteristics of populism mentioned prior, (2) criticism towards the elite and (3) the

homogeneity of the people, achieve maximal impact in populist mobilisation, when followed by (4) the proclamation of a serious crisis. Because the authenticity of the claims does not matter, provided that the sense that the people's economy and identity is under great threat is protected and preserved (Rooduijn, 2014). Additionally, in contrast to Kenneth Roberts' take, the authenticity behind the proclamation is secondary, due to crises playing an internal role in populism and thus, the narrative is controlled by the populists by hyperpolarising threats and maximising a rhetoric of urgency to strengthen homogeneity and the hostility towards the elite (t'Hart, 1993) (Stavrakakis et al., 2016). Mudde, similarly to Taggart acknowledges 'the heartland's' reactive qualities, but equally notes that one of the conditions for the mobilisation of the people is indeed a subjective '(perceived) serious challenge to 'our way of life'' (2004, p. 547). Empirical evidence by Pappas and Kriesi (2015) seems to further support Moffitt's (2016) view, as their study examined the causal relationship between a global crisis; the Great Recession and the surge of populist parties in Europe, showing very little signs of preexisting crisis as necessity for populist ascendancy. Rather it showed varying results from surges, slumps, and no reaction at all, as results suggested a number of country-specific conditions, such as how the crisis was perceived and how it was acted upon (Pappas & Kriesi, 2015).

Media and Protectionism

As previously addressed, how these transformation periods are perceived is also dependent on how the media propagates them. As part of the steps that Moffitt (2016) outlined as to how one would go about the performance of a crisis, with the fourth step proposing the utilisation of media. The maintenance of the crisis 'sense' may be performed by the populists, however it may very well be in control of the media and their chosen narrative. Yet it can be argued that even independent media is conditioned by 'media logic', leading to the specific promotion of coverage on polarising personalities, while disregarding attention towards traditional party structures, playing into the hands of populist ambitions (Kriesi, 2018, p. 17). Thus, a crisis, or the appearance of one triggers intensive reporting, coverage from political talk shows or even juridical processes, where the leader is given a platform to showcase their personality and solidify their position as the face of the general will (Boin et al., 2005). Stories of failure that strike a chord with people sentiments have proven highly effective, particularly in the context of social media providing a highly opportune platform for 'simplified, unilateral, and antagonistic forms of communication' (Caiani & Graziano, 2019, p. 1150).

Hay notes the importance of the media's workings in relation to populism (1996). The author does so by acknowledging that by not proactively resisting the interpellation of a narrator, people actively become subjects within a narrative and thus subjective to emotional vulnerabilities as viewers, readers, and listeners, particularly with prominent populist usage of 'we', 'they', 'us' and 'them' (Hay, 1996). A number of authors such as Maher et al. (2022) point out this exploitation of fears and frustrations connected with times of crises, populists are able to capitalise on through highly emotionally charged rhetoric. When the charismatic leader garners attention by catalysing an environment of crisis, they reach for a wide range of emotions. These include the propagation of anxiety towards the current state of society as well as hope and optimism towards the agenda of the populist movement (Maher et al. 2022). It undoubtedly acts as a key factor of the mutually beneficial relationship of populists and the media, as tabloid news outlets tend to adopt an equally populist use of language in parallel to maximise the appeal to the ordinary people (Norris, 2019). While the movement's use of language appeals to the emotions of the masses, the media finds a fitting unique selling point in attracting readers further with stories of an upcoming underdog with niche views (Moffitt, 2016). And in the event of negative representation of the movement, populism's thin centre resurfaces, as the media then may quickly be framed as an instrument of the crisis, that is controlled and mediated by the elite, thus hostile towards the movement (Mazzoleni, 2008). In fact, Brubaker argues that populism benefits from another crisis, 'the crisis of public knowledge' which he considers another ideal opportunity to criticise a biased institutionalised media as well pushing an 'alternative worldview' based on the exploitation of emotions of the ordinary people (2017, p. 279).

As part of this worldview also belongs pushing a protectionist narrative, as it has been radically on the rise. Particularly through former US President Donald Trump and his 'America first' approach to the United States' global trade network, which is in line with common protectionist rhetoric of protecting the local businesses (Fratzscher, 2020). Although usually discussed from an economic protectionism point of view, any propagation of crisis is often followed by an emphasis on what threats necessitate protectionist policies, including physical threats such as terrorism and crime, or cultural threats from outsiders or minority groups (Brubaker, 2017). Regardless of what it constitutes, desire and tendency for protectionism come from arguments, that demand priority and protection for nationals or 'insiders' from threats of 'outsiders' (Brubaker, 2011, p. 94).

Brubaker (2021) in a later text however contributes to yet another turning unexpected turning point in our understanding of populism's inner workings. He argues that while populism is 'ordinarily protectionist', it has turned populist parties' anti-protectionist during the Covid-19 pandemic (2021, p. 74). Brubaker refers to populism as being 'generally hostile to expertise', thus the 'politicisation of science' introduces another active agent with exclusive knowledge, adding to the elite actors with superior knowledge to the general public (2021, p. 74). The author adds that the gap between locals and experts in understanding the causes of what is limiting their fundamental freedom, only exacerbates the people's feelings of alienation from state processes (Brubaker, 2021) (Eyal, 2019). It reached the point where the national governments were considered greater proponents of the disruptions to social routines rather than the virus itself (Vieten, 2020). One could then conclude that populist rhetoric during Covid-19 in fact took aim at protecting the public from harm caused by scientists and politicians. Which were those often accused of being part of the Covid 'hoax', and thus responsible for the loss of people's liberties. Consequently, the imbalance between the experts and ordinary people became too large, to prevent another 'us versus them' dimension (Brubaker, 2021). The applied analysis offers insights into how the stances of AfD and Die Linke developed their positions surrounding the many policy topics that arose across the pandemic. The findings related to the right-wing AfD speeches complement Brubaker's paradox providing evidence of the mentioned anti-protectionist approach to the crisis. It showcases furthermore populism's fluid capability, as its thin centre can be made fully responsible for attaching itself to novel ideas, even when it contradicts key elements of its own definition. This serves as a reminder that it can shapeshift into any context and redefine who is part of the heartland and who is the enemy.

Horseshoe Theory & Right/Left Wing Populism

‘Wir werden Sie jagen’– ‘We will hunt you’ (Alexander Gauland, AfD, 2017, response to Chancellor Merkel after AfD election success)³

‘Theory’

Having now explored some of the available literature regarding the main concept of this study in populism and arguably one of the essential conditions it survives on; crises, the researcher now focuses on the final section. The researcher refers to horseshoe theory primarily due its illustrative functions, as the name already suggests, a linear shape that is bent into that of a horseshoe, with the purpose to represent a new interpretation of the political spectrum. One that was proposed by Jean-Pierre Faye, suggesting that the far-left and far-right share more similarities with each other than they do with the central views on the spectrum (Milonas, 2021). It implies that despite their severe differences, they meet in the middle on several key ideological aspects. The same applies to populist actors on their respective poles. Nonetheless, alongside the majority of scholars who gave their opinion on it, Micah J. Fleck disqualifies horseshoe theory from being considered a theory. According to the author, its attempts to prove similarities between left and right-wing are too simplistic as they fail to ‘explain function and process of observed facts’ (2021, p. 28). Fleck adds that its one-dimensional view is out of touch with modern party dynamics, that ignores the complexities and fluidity of populism (2021). This can in fact be supported by Matthijs Rooduijn’s study (2018) on what unites populist voters in their reason to vote for populist parties along the spectrum, where no reliable theme or attitude could be consistently identified what links the parties’ voter base. Equally unhappy with its usage is Simon Choat who labels it nonsense and merely defers to the fact although they share a common enemy in the neoliberal and globalised elite, the disagreement regarding specifics suffices for him to dismiss its substance (2017). Its reputation for illustrating the convergence of far-left and far-right parties is further hindered due to centrists’ critique that reduces them as mere protest parties, and that being the only quality they share (Morgan, 2022) (Rooduijn, 2018). Although despite its questionable comprehensiveness, depth, or reliability as a theory, when taken in context of far-left and far-right populism as well as its limitations, it provides a well-illustrated starting point.

³ BR24. (2017, September 24). *AfD-Politiker Gauland über Merkel: "Wir werden sie jagen!"*. Bayerischer Rundfunk. <https://www.br.de/bundestagswahl/afd-politiker-gauland-ueber-merkel-wir-werden-sie-jagen-100.html>

Similarities

As discussed, populism presupposes homogeneity among the common people and a common will that is in constant conflict with a common 'enemy'. In identifying the common enemy, populism's requirement to attach itself to more established ideologies due to its 'thin centre' implies that the identity of the enemy is at the discretion of the 'thick-centred ideology' it attaches to (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). For his US presidential campaigns of 2016 and 2020, democratic socialist Bernie Sanders took aim primarily at large corporations and the extremely wealthy (Norris, 2019). Hungarian President Viktor Orban and his national conservative Fidesz party on the other hand consider the EU leadership and illegal migrants as the great threat (Hunger & Baxton, 2022). Therefore, despite the ambiguity in specifying the elite's identity, credible examples have referred to the similarities between the two poles of populism. As Dick Pels fittingly points out himself while distinguishing between 'left vs right populism' is that 'the horseshoe model permits us to trace continuities without blurring the obvious differences (to compare is not the same as to equate)' (2013, p. 130-131). The Center for American Progress report on 'Drivers of Authoritarian Populism in the United States' notes that populism on the left and right shares key resemblance on several counts: 'deep suspicion of America's overseas military actions; alarm about the rise of a surveillance state; mistrust of major institutions; and suspicion of global elites' (Rohac et al., 2018). Brubaker acknowledges the existence of populism on the left, the right and hybrid formations that integrate elements from both sides, yet the representation of the people and the antagonism towards elites remains unchanged along the spectrum (2017).

Anton Derks (2004) showcased a strong example of how ideas from either side, or 'tendencies', as he refers to them, can indeed converge in specific cases (p. 516-517). His research found that populist voters, of which many are underprivileged, expressed dissatisfaction concerning social inequality, yet rejected the functions of the welfare state (Derks, 2004). He classified the former as 'left or egalitarianist' leaning and the latter 'right or anti-welfare statist' leaning, from which he could deduct that both dimensions engage with each other. Particularly observed when feelings of an imbalanced social state, transform into a redirected resentment towards the 'unresponsive elite, as well as the undeserving welfare recipients, such as the long-term unemployed, ethnic minorities and asylum seekers' (Derks, 2004, p. 519). Emmy Eklundh (2020) who conducts research in the field of left-wing populism in southern Europe suggests in an interview to illuminate left-wing views reflecting those from the right. Her example explores the populist left occasionally flirting with exclusionary measures such as closing

border, commonly associated with the right, under the banner of needing to establish socialism first nationally, then internationally, thus serving the natives first. She concludes by stating that when faced with the concept and importance of the nation-state, ‘the narrative of the nation is sometimes stronger than particular ideologies on the left and right’ (Eklundh, 2020).

Kildis (2020) approaches their similarities more extensively, similarly to this study within the framework of the Covid-19 crisis highlighting populists’ heightened affinity for conspiracies in their criticism against institutionalised expertise. In the presence of an ongoing conflict against the elite, institutions that endanger the will of the good people, breed paranoia, causing the search for comfort within conspiracies, regardless of left or right (Kriesi, 2018). Conspiracies all along the spectrum took aim at Bill Gates, George Soros or the World Health Organisation during the pandemic. Kildis notes further, populists of the far-left and far-right seem more inclined to victimise themselves, persistently portraying themselves as people holding the shorter end of the stick within society (2020). This helps to reason the antagonism required for populism to achieve its objective and manifest the people’s suffering by the hegemony, which is universally shared by all populists. It also underlines the moral conception regarding victimhood, as populism establishes who is deserving and who is undeserving of the welfare state, based on those included or excluded from the people (Kaltwasser & Zanotti, 2021). Wajner and Giurlando (2019) add that both right and left-wing populists share further similarities in foreign policy, as both tend to seek potential ideological allies abroad, along with their willingness to exacerbate societal tensions abroad to assist those movements.

The most striking example however is provided by Anastasia Bersenev’s (2022) study on ideological and strategic affiliation between Die Linke and AfD to the Russian Federation in their position as ‘Putin-Versteher’ (*Putin-Understanders*). When discussing the case selection, she acknowledges Germany’s populist parties’ peculiar stance on Russia and its President Vladimir Putin. It is an especially unique rise of power for the AfD, as pursuits for a German foreign policy led by German interests was part of a rhetoric the other Bundestag parties generally refrained from (Verbeek & Wojczewski, 2023). This invited a ‘discourse of Alternativlosigkeit’ (*‘alternativeless’*), leading to populist ambitions to reinvigorate German national sovereignty, especially in times of The Great Recession and Migrant Crisis of the mid-2010s (Kim, 2017, p. 4) (Verbeek & Wojczewski, 2023). The AfD is a conventional far-right populist party that follows the familiar path of being anti-establishment, anti-western and anti-globalisation, as well as being in favour of strong authoritarian structures. Their attributes

favourably match Russia's style of rule, led by a strong leader with highly restrictive control over staff and citizens. They have strong views on the historical and formerly good relationship with Russia, insisting that a cordial and diplomatic relationship with Russia is imperative for peace, in addition to balancing the United States' heavy influence on Germany (Verbeek & Wojczewski, 2023). Die Linke's affiliation has additionally historical grounds for an affinity towards Russia, as the modern party is an offspring of the former SED communist party of the former German Democratic Republic. Thus while under heavy influence from a centralised Communist Party in Moscow, many of the old values including the rejection of American imperialist ambitions still exist (Siewert, 2020). The former communist provinces of East Germany where most party members originate from, significantly lag behind the former West German states, having left a bitter taste of globalisation and the EU with voters (Arzheimer, 2023) (Siewert, 2020). Bersenev concluded with relatively clear results, that both parties share an ideological affiliation on the topic of Russia, not just on populist grounds, but due to inherent ideological foundations (2022).

Karin Priester assesses the reactionary qualities of populist parties to crises of hegemony and representation making them an attractive option purely as a form of protest against the ruling parties (2008). She addresses the ever-growing dilution of mainstream parties into a collective hegemony, that lack clear differences from the other, particularly when in power in a coalition. They disregard the empowerment of civil engagement and the reinvigoration of more representative democratic elements, leading to the alienation of voters from political processes and diminished trust (Caiani & Graziano, 2019). Priester argues that populist movements then pose as 'Protestbewegungen' (*protest movements*), independent of their location on the left/right dimension, taking on a corrective role, to point out democratic deficiencies of the hegemony. Therefore, both the right and left share 'reactive' and 'defensive' qualities, offering fertile grounds for mobilisation, when establishment agents rule according to personal interests and untransparent to the voters. Priester's conclusion then describes the 'populist syndrome' as fluid, weather, and mood dependent, acting as a defensive mechanism for the threatened middle class and resembles a chameleon with sometimes right and other times left colours (2008).

Exclusionary vs Inclusionary

When considering the number of similarities that exists within the literature, it may be argued that conventionally used left/right scales to illustrate polarisation lose their effectiveness due to one-dimensionality (Wagschal, 2020). In fact Maher et al. argues that it should be clearly separated from ‘left-right attitudes’ (2022, p. 823). Thus when encountering the aforementioned fluidity populism presents, the most comprehensive assessment has been provided by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013). It offers a clear differentiation of populism based on the consideration of origins and necessary demands required to achieve its goals. Their dimension divides populism into exclusionary versus inclusionary, with categories of material, political and symbolic dimensions for further specificity. Exclusionary populism under the material dimension refers to the exclusion of certain groups from state resources such as welfare or pension funds, whereas inclusionary actively seeks increased access to funding for discriminated and marginalised groups of society. Exclusionary under the political dimension implies the prevention of non-natives from political participation and typically associated with nationalism (Markou, 2017). Whereas inclusionary implies the integration of the politically disregarded and barred from participating, that shall regain their voice, typically associated with progressive patriotism (Markou, 2017). Lastly the symbolic dimension refers to exclusionary populism claiming to represent the people and what defines the people under national or ethnic values, thus excluding those that do not qualify. Inclusionary populism on the other hand aims to generate symbolic inclusion, by when referring to the core element of ‘the people’ in fact addressing the poor and marginalised at the fringes of society (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

The descriptions of inclusionary populism were accompanied by examples of former President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and former President Evo Morales in Bolivia, and clearly imply the otherwise considered far-left dimension of populism. The exclusionary description referred to examples in Europe include Front National’s Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and Austrian Freedom Party’s Jörg Haider, representing the far-right dimension if populism. Yet what makes this scale more proficient at providing a stable framework for our understanding of populist dynamics, is that it considers the contradictory and flexible nature of populism. While a left/right dimension presupposes conditions set for conventional political agents, the exclusionary/inclusionary populism dimension simplifies as to who it represents and against whom it antagonises. The ‘other’ to inclusionary populists are mostly those that prevent the process of inclusion such as oligarchs, foreign investors, the media and for exclusionary those

that are to be excluded such as the culturally different (Caiani & Graziano, 2019). It has also provided a fairly simple normative link to what type of crisis matches which populism. Caiani and Graziano emphasised the importance of crisis in the context of populism within this alternative framework (2019). It deduces that out of the recent crises the 2008 economic depression matches more a rise of inclusionary populism and the migrant crisis of the mid-2010s more that of exclusionary populism (Caiani & Graziano, 2019). As a result, one can acknowledge the existence of striking similarities, not only on the basis of who to oppose, but ideological agreements that may be irregular but not unusual. Nonetheless, in order to find a scale that acknowledges the polarity of populism, a political party dimension has become obsolete in recent history due to the complex characterisation of modern populist actors, movements, or parties (Norris, 2019).

Methodology

As previously elaborated within the introduction, the objective of this research is to analyse the relationship between populist party policies and times of crises. In investigating this relationship, the researcher aims to examine the stances of populist far-right party AfD, and populist far-left party Die Linke in the presence of global crises. The case studies representing these crises include the 2022 Ukraine War and the Covid-19 pandemic. The unit of analysis comprises of speech segments extracted from parliamentary speeches made by members from both parties. The objective of this study therefore is to identify the extent to which populist parties from opposite ends of the spectrum converge on their positions on policies during times of crises. The applied method to this investigation is elaborated in the following sections: (1) Research Design, (2) Data and (3) Analysis.

Research Design

‘Sie muß in den nächsten Jahren als fundamentaloppositionelle Bewegungspartei gegen die Feinde des Gewordenen organisieren’ – ‘It must organise itself to become the fundamentally oppositional movement party against the enemies of the established’ (Björn Hoecke, AfD, 2015, referring to AfD’s future)⁴

Research Question and Variables

The posed research question of this study asks to what extent the presence of global crises evoke policy agreement on policies between one populist far-right and one populist far-left party in Germany. Times of global crises here acts as the independent variable with stance convergence of AfD and Die Linke as the dependent variable. When applying Day and Koivu’s (2019) puzzle approach logic, this research clearly follows an empirical research puzzle as it bridges extensive knowledge of real-life events to the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework. Implementing the chosen framework for detection allowed the researcher to focus

⁴ Meister et al., (2019, January 28). *Wir veröffentlichen das Verfassungsschutz-Gutachten zur AfD*. Netzpolitik.org. https://netzpolitik.org/2019/wir-veroeffentlichen-das-verfassungsschutz-gutachten-zur-afd/#2019-01-15_BfV-AfD-Gutachten_Quelle-625

on the dynamic of the relationship itself and its consistency across two very individual case studies, thus making this an empirical ‘variation over time’ research puzzle (Day & Koivu, 2019, p. 381). This study’s research question therefore also seeks to explore the reasons for the potential convergence that varied specifically during the time periods of the selected cases. The researcher proceeds with this approach as it allows the examined concepts to describe the nature of the relationship that exists between both variables.

Independent variable: Presence of a global crisis (as defined by Rosenthal et al. (1989) as cited in Boin et al. (2009 p.2)).

In defining the independent variable, the researcher refers to the conceptualisation of the term ‘crisis’ by Rosenthal et al. (1989) as cited in Boin et al. (2009 p. 2) which is understood as ‘a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions.’ This definition not only offers a thorough understanding of crises themselves, but moreover how their presence is acknowledged, which is through the urgency that warrants a decisive intervention by policymakers.

Dependent variable: Convergence of stance on policies by AfD and Die Linke parties.

The chosen dependent variable for this study implies that the speakers’ detected stance also suggests the policies they pursue. While the verb to converge is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as ‘to come from other places to meet in a particular place’ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d), in terms of policy, it is ‘the tendency of policies to grow more alike, in the form of increasing similarity in structures, processes, and performances’ (Drezner, 2001, p. 53). Moreover, based on the definitions, the dependent variable figuratively implies the parties’ location on the linear political spectrum as distant from one another. Convergence of their stance on the policies during the selected time periods will be achieved once the researcher identifies a consistent display of convergence across all policy topics within at least one of the same thematic categories for both crises. This criterion was chosen for two reasons:

- (1) As depicted in Wagschal (2020), all parties represented in the Bundestag were matched and compared based on data collected from the Voting Advice Application ‘Wahl-O-Mat’. Despite their expected dissimilarities, a percentage of 26.3% policy agreement

was detected, where a direct comparison between AfD and Die Linke ranked as second least similar. Based on this information, the posed research question intentionally presupposed a preexisting degree of agreement by asking 'to what extent'. Thus, instead of considering singular scattered instances of agreement, this study seeks a repeated display across all policy topics within their corresponding thematic categories to detect convergence.

- (2) Due to the wide scope of policy topics this study incorporated, measuring for precise levels of convergence to compare between both case studies was not feasible. Heichel et al. (2005, p. 835), go as far as describing a 'general' judgement on the degree of policy convergence' as impossible. However, the authors simultaneously acknowledge the lack of research on policy-specific convergence (Heichel et al., 2005). Thus in order to test for the dependent variable, this study concentrated on categorical consistency of stance convergence across the selected subcategories. This was achieved through speech segments from each party that were coded with a similar stance related to a policy topic counting towards a convergence instance (CI). Therefore, the study's objective of examining the extent of convergence was achieved by measuring the frequency of policy topics where a CI took place.

Hypothesis

The presence of populism and its complex relationship to crises as overarching concept therefore leads a hypothesis that 'in the presence of global crises, populist parties AfD and Die Linke express stance convergence in their parliamentary speech'. The researcher poses this hypothesis next to the previously stated objectives with the aim to explore a consistent relationship. This evolves from previous literature that acknowledges a number of inherent similarities between the populist far-right and far-left in reference to horseshoe theory such as Derks (2004). However, it predominantly does so by referring to the similarities that exist between both voter bases. In contrast, this study seeks identify this relationship under the conditions of a crisis as defined by Rosenthal et al. (1989) as cited in Boin et al. (2009 p. 2) as 'a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions.' Hence, the researcher hypothesises that the manner in which populist far-left, and far-right parties respond to such societal transformations, produces stance convergence on policies expressed via parliamentary speeches made by elected individuals of their respective parties.

Successful testing of this hypothesis will be represented in the results by patterns of consistent agreement under a thematic category for each case study. The presence of disproportionate results where topic-specific convergence can be for example witnessed under just one category and patterns of regular disagreement under the other three categories would indicate unsuccessful results. Disproportionate results could however be explanatory of an alternative association between the variables this study had not previously considered. For that reason this study also seeks to explain other potential causes for stance similarities. The subcategories represent the various policy dimensions, under the transformative conditions of a crisis, specifically those relevant at the time of the case studies. Thus, signs of convergence along all policy topics within a thematic category for each crisis would characterise a causal relationship between both variables.

Reliability & Validity

In the design of this study, the reliability level achieved for the applied method has been of great importance. In essence, reliability can be defined as how dependably a measuring instrument produces its measurement (Bannigan & Watson, 2009). Due to the natural occurrence of random errors throughout the operationalisation process, their mitigation contributes towards the replicability of future studies applying a similar approach (Franklin et al., 2010). In catering for the potentiality of random errors, the authenticity of the data collected was a vital prerequisite, particularly as this method deducts stances from speeches. These however have not been documented by the speakers themselves and rather by parliamentary stenographs, whose accuracy is tested through multilayered verification via computed and human reviewing (bundestag.de, n.d.). The transparency of parliamentary processes provided on the website of the Bundestag simplifies replicability and traceability of all data used within this study. As for the coding process, the use of the Nvivo 14 qualitative analysis programme allowed for the recording of the entire coding procedure, including the annotation categories and the stances.

With a detailed explanation on the application and purpose to follow in the analysis section (3.3), the annotation categories contributed to restricting potential bias in simplifying how stance annotation was determined, and which stance was expressed. Adapting this framework from Rohit and Singh (2018) provided a reliable instrument in ensuring that the identification of utterances was replicable. This was complemented by the text query function in Nvivo 14 capable of reviewing the entire corpora through key words and the modal verbs illustrated in

the verbal lexicon (table 2). The researcher this way ensured of the elimination of unnoticed errors, in addition to all data to be coded being included and coded correctly in correspondence with the employed framework. (Bersenev, 2022).

In confirming this study as valid, the researcher ensures that the employed instrument has specifically measured the intended target reliably (Gidron, 2020). This was achieved by incorporating scales into this study that precisely aim to measure positions of the selected parties and their respective members. As highlighted in the related works section, scales such as stance analysis of parliamentary speeches, legislative roll call voting and positions gathered from manifestos included in this paper are well-established methods. These methods equally aim to evaluate subjective positions from parliamentary data. Thus the researcher ensures that the study's objectives align with the implemented methodology in order to maintain a high level of validity.

Data

‘Veränderung beginnt mit Opposition’ – ‘Change begins with opposition’ (PDS Campaign Slogan, 1994)⁵

Case selection

This research study is a concentrated small-N study focusing on qualitative data extracted from two specific cases, emblematic of the literature on crises addressed in the theoretical framework. These are the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020 and the Russia’s invasion on Ukraine in 2022 leading to the Ukraine War still ongoing at the time of this writing. While acknowledging the distinct nature of the selected cases and their profound differences, the lack of similarity was expected to contribute to stronger results if consistent causality between stance convergence and time of crises was discovered. In proceeding with both cases, this study considers their global far-reaching impact as essential to this study, forcing drastic measures from political agents domestically and internationally. The definitions of crisis emphasised on their transitional and out-of-the-norm nature as policymaking actors remain with the responsibility of implementing harsh measures.

Boin et al. (2005) point out three key features to consider in approaching the identification of crises: (1) threat, (2) uncertainty and (3) urgency. This understanding characterises the nature of the case studies further as decisive intervention had to be undertaken and the public had been aware of the related threats and urgency of the matter (Bobba & Hubé, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic reflected these features unequivocally, with its reputation as ‘the greatest crisis since the Second World War’ and a monumental public threat with 6.5 million fatalities almost two years after the first confirmed case (Alizadeh et al., 2023, p. 2139). The uncertainty and urgency of this crisis were primarily observed by the profound societal restrictions implemented by state administrations globally to tackle an unprecedented situation, with an estimation of 1 billion people under full lockdown measures by the beginning months of the pandemic (Wassler & Talarico, 2021). The factor of the unknown regarding symptoms, infection rates, cures and the unreliability of statistics, in combination with the pressing urgency meant that numerous restrictions in fact led to the deterioration of people’s physical and mental health,

⁵ Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek. (n.d.). *Das Rote Buch – Bilder der Träume von C. G. Jung*. <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/KJKBEG7LL6GJ4YYUESNCGNELAODC5N6I>

and the breakdown of healthcare services (Murphy et al., 2021). Discriminatory behaviour due to specific nationalities denied entry at state borders and the spreading of misinformation and conspiracies due to unclear public reports surrounding the virus spiked (Wassler & Talarico, 2021). And while lockdowns had negative impacts on economies worldwide, they likely had far greater disproportionate effects on low-income households and small businesses, exacerbating the labour markets and increasing inequality (Sumner et al., 2023).

Similarly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine that has led to a war on the European continent thus self-evidently poses critical threats to safety and peace, urging imperative action, particularly for Germany. Not only threats of war but a subsequent migration crisis loomed as Germany admitted more than 1 million Ukrainian refugees as of September 2023, in addition to the high rates of asylum-seekers entering from non-EU states (Mello, 2024). As the unknown surrounding Putin's intentions and actions skyrocketed inflation rates globally, the Ampelkoalition ('*stoplight coalition*'; due to party colours of SPD, FDP & Buendnis 90/Die Gruene) stared down the barrel of an energy supply crisis due to the state's dependency on Russian oil and gas imports (Wiertz et al., 2023). The urgency behind the threat of empty energy reserves prior to winter sparked intense disagreement within the coalition government of Germany and anxiety in light of the rising energy costs. The uncertainty of the crisis also sparked significant political instability in regard to Germany's involvement in an active conflict zone through the delivery of heavy weaponry, especially among the coalition parties. The lack of consensus responding to these key features of crises as the ones outlined by Boin et al. (2005) in particular have vehemently weakened chancellor Scholz' public support recently, having led to disappointing 2024 EU election results and a sharp rise in support for opposition party AfD.

Both case studies also encompass another crucial component of how the existing literature understands crises. Brubaker (2011; 2021) outlines this in context of economic crises, whereas Moffitt (2015; 2016) raises it more in relation to populism, however both bring awareness to the constructive aspect of crises relevant to both cases. Considering this as a defining aspect of conceptualising crisis is important as both case studies experienced alternative interpretations by one or both populist parties at a certain stage. As a consequence, despite distinct causes, timelines and impacts, 'political responses to economic distress depend on how economic troubles are framed and interpreted' (Brubaker, 2011, p. 96). This had been the case with populist right-wing parties across the world, including the AfD. As Brubaker (2021) described the paradox, the party went completely against protectionist norms of populism, reframing and

performing the crisis as a mainly economic crisis, where the harm was committed by the government on citizens' fundamental rights.

- „Nicht der Virus richtet den Wirtschaftsstandort Deutschland zugrunde, sondern die völlig unkoordinierten, unlogischen und nicht nachvollziehbaren Lockdowns dieser Regierung und der korrespondierenden Landesregierungen.“⁶

Uwe Witt (AfD) – (28.01.21 – Tagesordnungspunkt 13; Zusatzpunkt 5: Anpassungen der Coronavirus-Teststrategie für das Jahr 2021)

Translation: ‘Not the virus is tearing down the economy state Germany, instead it is the entirely uncoordinated, illogical and unreasonable lockdowns of this administration and the corresponding state parliaments.’

- „Haben Sie mal darüber nachgedacht, warum wir hier immer auf Antrag der Opposition diskutieren, warum sich Deutschland nicht an diesem Krieg beteiligen soll, warum wir keine Waffen liefern und stattdessen Frieden schaffen sollen? Weil die Bundesregierung eben aus Parteien besteht, die ihre Wahlversprechen gebrochen haben, die lieber Krieg führen, als Frieden zu schaffen, und weil sie die Grundsätze der Außenpolitik der Nachkriegszeit komplett über Bord geworfen haben.“⁷

Petr Bystron (AfD) – (02.03.23 – Zusatzpunkt 2: Diplomatie statt Panzer – Für eine Verhandlungsinitiative zur Beendigung des Krieges der Russischen Föderation gegen die Ukraine)

Translation: ‘Have you thought about why we always discuss by request of the opposition, as for why Germany should not partake in this war, why we should not deliver weapons and make peace instead? Because the government consists of parties that break their campaign promises, that prefer leading a war over making peace and because they have thrown the principles of our post-war foreign policy completely overboard’.

Similarly, one can observe a reframing of the notion crisis of the Ukraine War, where Russia's aggression is not considered as an imminent threat to Germany's safety. Instead, the propagated

⁶Bundestag. (2021). *Plenarprotokoll 19/206* [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/19/19206.pdf>

⁷Bundestag. (2023). *Plenarprotokoll 20/88* [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20088.pdf>

narrative consists of a problematic German government sending weapons into an active warzone, against the state's prime energy supplier, inflating prices and consequentially instrumentalising it to enforce the renewable energy transition (Bersenev, 2022). One could therefore argue that within its conventional definition, in addition to crises' propensity to fabrication and propagation, especially when investigated in context of populist parties, the selected case studies are in fact comparable. Harsh effects on areas such as financial markets, supply chains, migration among others, their threats to physical safety and the resulting public anxiety make these case studies suitable for this text. The imminent danger of illness, with its unpredictable severity and the possibility of death during the pandemic, alongside the threat of a greater Russian invasion on Europe, or even a third World War, all provide a strong overarching framework to allow for observation of the populist parties to engage in protectionist rhetoric.

Addressed in the theoretical framework section of this paper, protectionism holds a central key to the characteristics of populism, as it ultimately seeks to preserve the wellbeing of the ordinary people against any threats. While they hold the view that these are conventionally caused by the elite, populist parties are quick to react in adjusting protectionist policies accordingly, to threats the people are supposedly endangered by, such as migrant influxes. It is also crucial to mention the highly divisive consequence both crises have had on German society. Both have endangered inherent constitutional and historical norms unprecedented in modern times, signified by the rise of conspiracy theorists and hostility towards the government. During the pandemic this led to events such as the attempted storming of the Reichstag at its peak.

Defining the Subjects: Far-Right & Far-Left Parties

As subjects of this study and the included case studies, the parties selected are Germany's AfD and Die Linke. And as this section demonstrates, the former which is a far-right party and the latter a far-left party, are found on opposite ends of the political spectrum, as well as being well-established in the German party system. Due to its popularised wide usage, it is necessary to firstly distinguish what is meant by a 'far-right' or 'far-left' party. Pirro (2023), in reference to the far-right understands it as a collective umbrella concept referring to the radical and extreme subtypes of the right-wing. Luke March similarly divides the term into radical and extreme, while referring to the left-wing, simplifying it into parties that are on 'the left of social

democracy’ (2008, p. 3). And as this study strongly associates radicalism to populism, or at least as an instrument regularly used by radical parties, it is however imperative to make the distinction to extremism on the basis of their stance on the ‘liberal-democratic constitutional order’ of the state (Pirro, 2023, p. 105) (Kriesi & Schulte-Cloos, 2020) (March, 2008). In exploring subtypes of contemporary radical left parties and concentrating on the democracy accepting subtype, Keith et al., (2023) summarise key features as:

- Negative attitude towards Soviet Union
- Reject capitalism & neo-liberalism
- Appeal to all that oppose the elite
- Concentrate on environmentalism & gender conflicts
- Supportive of migrants, minority rights & multiculturalism
- Pacifist
- Supportive of EU integration

The above-mentioned key features of radical left parties are similarly represented in the party manifesto of Die Linke from 2021 as gathered from The Manifesto Project or MARPOR. The MARPOR database is an award-winning data platform that compiles party manifestos of over 1000 political parties, from over 50 different countries, since 1945 until today to perform policy analysis and examine the quality of programmatic representation. This study uses this data as a way of validating key features of the radical left and radical right as mentioned in the literature, with that of the codebook and assigned codes of MARPOR database.

It is important to note that the frequency of assigned codes is highly dependent on the length of the coded manifesto, which in case of the mentioned parties and the most recent federal election of 2021 means that Die Linke (76111 words) will have far greater frequency than the AfD (29213 words) (Bersenev, 2022). While the researcher acknowledges the slim likelihood of the most recent election campaign manifesto to include all of the mentioned features of contemporary radical left parties, the MARPOR coded manifesto illustrated a significant overlap with these properties. Referring to the properties gathered from literature, below are the codes and their corresponding assignation frequency with the most assigned references of the manifesto of Die Linke’s 2021 campaign:

(codename – frequency of assigned code)

- Per403: Market Regulation - 261

- Per504: Welfare State Expansion - 518
- Per701: Labour Groups: Positive - 412

- Per202.1: Democracy - 247
- Per301: Federalism – 259

- Per503: Equality: Positive - 863

- Per501: Environmental Protection - 229

- Per105: Military: Negative - 164
- Per106: Peace - 53

Considering this information, this research can deduct that Die Linke is in fact a far-left party, more specifically, one that is radical left. Which simultaneously creates a direct link to populism, as the strategies employed by radical left parties, suggest a consistent pattern of endorsing a degree of populist ideas (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017).

When applying the same approach, Mudde (2007) proposes three overarching concepts encompassing the attributes of the far-right, in an attempt to classify their ideologies accordingly: nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Although, as Halikiopoulou (2023) rightfully remarks, it is necessary here to explain the simplicity of the classification. This includes that nativism, a central part of the far-right, different to nationalism and far more tied to identity, whereas nationalism on the other hand resembles more an instrument to give for justification of social policy positions (Halikiopoulou, 2023, p. 127). This study previously established the difference between radical right and extreme right, and exclusively considers the former's positions as it encompasses populist parties that are not opposed to the constitutional democratic system. Hence the reason why authoritarianism must not imply fascism and instead may stand for strengthening law and order policies (Mudde, 2007). Upon compiling the literature of both Mudde and Halikiopoulou, these key features emerge in describing radical right parties:

- Positive attitude toward democracy
- Supportive of law-and-order measures

- Welfare chauvinism
- Anti-immigration stance
- National economic sovereignty

These key features were equally weighed against the data found in the MARPOR dataset and compared as to which of these radical right attributes overlap:

(*codename – frequency of assigned code*)

- Per110: European Community/Union: Negative – 113
- Per201.1: Freedom – Democracy - 103
- Per401: Free Market Economy – 132
- Per505: Welfare State Limitation – 7
- Per601.2: Immigration: Negative – 72
- Per605.1: Law and Order – General: Positive - 78

Based on the comparison of the radical right attributes between literature and the assigned codes from the MARPOR dataset, this study deduces that the AfD is in fact a far-right party. More precisely, it is a populist radical right party based on an inherent focus on people-centrism, value of democracy and the inclusion of exclusionary populist attributes via nativism and nationalism (Mudde, 2007) (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017) (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

Unlike the similarly far-left DKP and far-right party Die Heimat (who are extensively more extremist), both AfD and Die Linke have seats in the Bundestag and therefore are able to influence policymaking and hold speeches. Although Die Linke has officially lost its official status as a parliamentary faction (*‘Fraktion’*) since 06/12/2023⁸, caused by the departure of

⁸ Due to the exit of the elected party members, Die Linke was not able to satisfy the required number of 37 Bundestag representatives or 5% of the Bundestag and was therefore forced to dissolve their status as a ‘Fraktion’. The dissolution among other restrictions limits allocated speaking times and influence in policymaking.

several elected officials including former co-chair Sahra Wagenknecht, this had no effect on the findings of this study. Each party suitably contrasts the other with Die Linke as a populist party and historically established from the early reunification years as a successor of the communist SED, although displaying considerably weak performances in recent general elections (Olsen, 2023). The AfD on the opposite is still to be considered a relatively new party that arose from the economic and EU crises of the late 2000s and early 2010s. Particularly the migration crisis of the mid-2010s, transformed the AfD from a primarily Eurosceptic, economically protectionist populist party to strongly focusing their campaign narrative on anti-immigration policies and filling the vacuum among the mainstream parties for a growing nationalistic electorate (Verbeek & Wojczewski, 2023). Although Die Linke has not been able to derive momentum as successfully as the AfD, it holds power in coalition parliaments in Bremen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In Thuringia, Die Linke hold the Minister-President seat with Bodo Ramelow, at the time of this writing. Both parties enjoy the majority of their support in the east-German states, among other reasons, due to conventional populist targeting of less wealthy and underdeveloped regions. Yet equally due to the region's appreciation for traditional policies that reflect the values of an emigration plagued and aging eastern-German population (Lembcke, 2021).

Ever since the German re-unification in 1990, the former communist states had struggled to keep up with the fast-growing American influenced West-German states, exacerbated by large amounts of outward migration. Because the infrastructure has remained neglected in the former East German territories since communist times, the region continues to suffer from lack of opportunities and political disregard which has hampered the region's development. The disappointment that began to propagate, after hopes of better living standards equal to those of the west-German states did not materialise. With societal unity across West and East Germany never truly achieved, transition remained incomplete in the east. This as a result invited opportunities for dissent towards Americanism and westernism to grow and pockets of pro-Russian attitudes to prevail in the former GDR. As mentioned in the previous chapter, both AfD and Die Linke share a continued effort of being 'Putin-Understanders', largely for this portion of the German population (Bersenev, 2022).

For this reason, this study expected policy stance convergences on Russia related themes. Moreover, it anticipated the discovery of commonalities between both parties in criticism of USA's and NATO's significant influence on German security policies and western hegemony

aspirations in context of the Ukraine War crisis. This selection of cases also allowed this research project to raise similar expectations for the Covid-19 crisis, due to populists' doubtful attitude towards science. Particularly for the pandemic as it interfered in basic human liberties globally and mostly forcefully dictated people's lives, referring back to the importance of populist protectionism. The researcher nonetheless expected the discovery of convergence in the form of acceptance for these measures in protecting the population and guaranteeing public safety. However, based on Roger Brubaker's observations of the pandemic, an unusual phenomenon for the pandemic could be observed (2021). Brubaker notes the paradox shared by several populist actors around the world, normalising and redirecting the blame at the establishment for having harmed public health through lockdowns and economic depression due to the restrictions on the domestic and global economies. Thus the threats prompting the protectionist measures would shift and yield entirely different results to those expected. The test results reflect this phenomenon, as this provides further evidence in proving the dynamic core of populism to shapeshift and redefine the boundaries of its thin centre.

Data collection

The main source of data for this study comprises of Bundestag speeches by elected representatives of the German parliament from the 19th and 20th parliamentary terms. The researcher is a native German and native English speaker; thus a translation software was not required in the evaluation of these documents. Stenographic reports have been centrally located and made transparently accessible on the official website of the German government under *Bundestag.de/protokolle*. This source contains a plenary transcription archive dating back to the first session of the newly formed federal republic in 1949 and are updated daily after each plenary session. Results can be refined by entering the desired term, topic or timeframe. Upon accessing and downloading the available pdf document to a personal device, the researcher stored all files locally to eliminate any possibility of the documents being removed due to changes by the website administrator or local servers. This was imperative to anticipate due to growing cyber-security necessitating the denial of access from IP-addresses from users outside of Germany attempting to gain access to official documents. This had been the case with the archive on the official AfD website, which played a decisive role in the researcher remaining solely with speeches as primary source. Files were saved, named according to the date of the relevant sessions and topics and thus stored chronologically. An example of this may be '29.08.22 – Waffentlieferungen' (*Weapon deliveries*).

Upon accessing the plenary transcripts besides the speeches, these documents contain a summary of all points of order (*Tagesordnungspunkte*) of the day's plenary session. All speakers and their parties, remarks by the Bundestag president, remarks regarding roll call voting proceedings, results of roll call voting, parliament member birthday wishes, death notices, starting and ending times of sessions, mentions of special events and official guests, disciplinary measures taken by the Bundestag president as well as objections against actions taken by the Bundestag president are also included. Parliamentary data, such as the one collected from the Bundestag website as described provides essential, transparent and traceable information for academia, while most significantly for its societal relevance (Rohit & Singh, 2018).

As for the Covid-19 pandemic, the dates of collected data ranges from 25.03.2020 to 31.12.2022. For the Ukraine War, this range is from 16.03.2022 to 31.12.2023. Data collection for the two cases required varied approaches particularly due to their distinct impact it had on political discourse within parliament. The impacts of Covid-19 were felt in all spheres of society, including debates surrounding public health, economics, education, social services, environmental, tourism, culture and sports. Whereas the Ukraine War crisis has had its effects predominantly on national security, defence sector and foreign policy. In order to protect comparativeness, the researcher set up four thematic categories consisting of (1) policies concerning direct measures in response to the crisis, (2) domestic policies related to the crisis, (3) foreign policy topics and (4) one further category reserved for a frequently discussed theme specific to each case study. While policies regarding vaccinations made up the final category for the Covid-19 case, energy related policies made up the final category for the Ukraine War crisis. Once the most frequently discussed topics were added to the relevant thematic category, the researcher utilised the plenary documents and information deep search function, or DIP. This search function via keywords and date ranges became a crucial element in guaranteeing that potential utterances made in speeches regarding policies related to the selected thematic categories were not overseen.

The researcher then proceeded to add policy topics based on the frequency of the topics scheduled on plenary session days within the chosen date ranges. It is important to note a noticeable imbalance within the number of stances and speech segments collected. This was caused by Die Linke's smaller share of seats in parliament. As the smallest opposition party in

the Bundestag the difference can be significant, as a 90-minute debate session for example allocates 5 minutes to Die Linke and twice as much to AfD party members who receive 10 minutes. The same applies to the Ukraine War as the time range is smaller than that of the pandemic, however neither imbalance presented itself as an obstructive effect on the coding.

In order to increase the accuracy of the results, this study also included the results of legislative rollcall votes casted by elected Bundestag members on proposed bill drafts (*Gesetzentwürfe*), collected within the same timeframe the speeches were gathered in. An exception was made for the additional inclusion of results gathered from motion proposals (*Anträge*) brought to the Bundestag by either AfD or Die Linke. Due to reliability concerns regarding party discipline influence on voting behaviour, this method was solely applied as a means for verification of the stance analysis results. Nonetheless, considering the voting results as an instrument for this study was expected to have several advantages. In the event that convergence is observed within the corresponding thematic categories in addition to legislative voting agreement from both parties, the reliability of the coding will increase and help this study prove a successful hypothesis. The included data collected reflect the results of all the votes casted, providing an insight whether convergence was exclusive to AfD and Die Linke as populist parties, in contrast to the remaining parties in parliament. Moreover, it brought attention to whether they voted similarly or along with other political parties and to what extent party discipline was observed as a factor preventing an overlap to the stance analysis results. The inclusion of the motion proposals made by AfD or Die Linke served the sole purpose of identifying policy convergence in direct agreement with the other party's motion. Consistent stance agreement via speech, but direct disagreement on the other's motion proposal were indicative of party discipline constraints. Whereas a vice versa scenario may point at the possibility of strategic affiliation of the two parties to harm the coalition parties.

Legislative voting results were similarly collected from the Bundestag website under *Bundestag.de/abstimmung*. However, data was collected further under *Abgeordnetenwatch.de/bundestag/abstimmungen*, which is a website administered by a transparency NGO called 'Parlamentwatch e.V.' aimed at increasing public awareness of government processes. Here similarly on both sources, the policy field was selected to refine results in correspondence with the case studies and date ranges were set equal to those of the collected speech segments. Although it may be necessary to clarify that speeches were not purposefully chosen in accordance to be validated by the votes after the stance analysis, as not

every speech related to the case studies had a legislative rollcall vote bound to it. Moreover, this also implied a strong representation of certain policy areas and very little to none in others.

Analysis

„Keine Politik für die Mehrheit, ohne eine Politik gegen die Interessen einer egozentrischen Minderheit“ – „No politics for the majority, without politics against the interests of an egocentric minority“ (Kevin Kühnert, SPD, 2019, on wealth tax policies)⁹

Stance analysis

As primary method, this study applies an opinion-mining technique referred to as stance analysis, stance classification or detection or position-taking analysis. Stance represents the attitude and opinion of an individual towards a proposition (Biber & Finegan, 1988). The measurement of stance in the past has been closely associated to sentiment analysis, as its definition encompasses assigning ‘an opinion or emotional label to text’ (Stine, 2019, p. 288). In explaining the researcher’s choice in selecting this method however, stance analysis needs to be separated from the commonly associated sentiment analysis, as according to Burnham, sentiment analysis seeks ‘positive or negative emotional valence’, whereas stance analysis seeks an individual’s answer to a proposition (2023, p. 3). In the gathering of data from politician’s speeches, these speeches are responses to propositions agreed prior to be discussed within parliament, which require no degree of sentiment measurement in order to gather the data required for this study (Burnham, 2023). Mohammad et al. (2017) narrows the definition down further by highlighting the requirement of stance analysis to have a predetermined target, from which an inference of stance may then follow.

Sentiment analysis would be furthermore unsuitable, as this study examines two cases studies of crises with both, in the most severe interpretation are life threatening to individuals, and at the very core have caused a transformation of the previously conventional idea of society. Therefore, one can presume that the corpus will largely reflect rhetoric with negative sentiment, even if the speaker’s stance towards a proposition is positive. Schiller et al. (2020) make up stance analysis based on two inputs: a discussion topic and a statement made by an author. What makes this technique suitable for this study is that a corpus consisting of parliamentary speeches contains predetermined discussion topics on which the authors (elected members of parliament) are expected to make statements in reference to these topics. A high level of

⁹ BayernSPD. (2019, September 2). *Politischer Gillamoos: Zitate Kevin Kühnert mit O-Ton*. <https://bayernspd.de/news/politischer-gillamoos-zitate-kevin-kuehnert-mit-o-ton/>

engagement had been expected with this method, as parties naturally required to argue and distinguish their stance in parliament for political gain. Thus a high level of ‘linguistic subjectivity’ was observed, expressing ‘what is true, should be true or should be done in his or her view of the world’ (Somasundaran & Wiebe, 2010, p. 116-117).

Existing literature where this approach was applied to parliament corpus, as suggested by Gavin Abercrombie and Riza Batista-Navarro (2020), has commonly originated from the fields of computer science and political science for political and linguistic analysis, or the analysis of a performance of method or system. Across recent decades this technique was applied to a variety of studies in detecting stances from news articles, product reviews, fake news detection and social media analysis (Schiller et al., 2020). A vast amount of these studies resort to supervised models and the usage of trained support vector machines (SVMs) to annotate large amounts of text with their appropriate outcome based on algorithms. While the current research continues to make progress in this field, especially via AI, the researcher chose to annotate the corpus entirely manually for a variety of reasons. One of which mentioned prior is in regard to the case studies reflecting times of crises. Concerns of contextual control and the classification of stance inferences when extracted from topics that require large amounts of background information such as Covid-19 and the Ukraine War contributed to this choice. Open-source & Large Language Models are therefore not useful to this study due to its contextual limitations, in addition to limitations regarding reliability and reproducibility of text-annotation (Kristensen-McLachlan et al., 2023).

For this study, the active decision to focus on parliamentary speeches as primary data source for this experiment ahead of roll call votes was made for two reasons. (1) Due to concerns for potential party discipline leading to biased and non-representative results. Which was especially relevant as the researcher compared positions from members of parties that generally view each other with hostility and compete ideologically from the opposition. Nonetheless, as an integral element of policymaking, results were not disregarded and instead utilised as an additional unit of analysis to verify the speech analysis findings. Moreover they contributed towards recognising indications for party discipline where the collected stance from speech did not overlap with that from the vote. (2) Due to large amounts of data collected from parliamentary speakers, with the expectation for expressions of stance on several issues within a single allocated speech slot. Particularly by amplifying their position on related debates or rebuttals to external content such as prior speakers, social media and events. Additionally,

results will reflect a more realistic perspective of parliament member opinions, whose authentic opinions and individual style of conveying their opinion may lose its intention behind the collective voting of their party (Schwarz et al., 2021).

Coding

The coding process for this study consisted of two parts:

- (1) The labelling of speech segments and placement into their suitable annotation category as part of the coding framework adapted from Rohit and Singh (2018).
- (2) Coding the speech segments into the correct thematic category to interpret the data in terms of categorical patterns.

The classification of stance was approached by means of the qualitative analysis software Nvivo 14 and a specified coding framework from a previous studies applying stance detection to speeches. This framework originates from Rohit and Singh (2018) who analysed speeches in Indian parliamentary debates, as they applied four categories to apply alongside the coding of statements that express a stance. These include (1) *appreciation* defined as ‘appreciating and justifying policies, governments by mentioning the benefits and efforts of it’, (2) *call for action* defined as ‘speeches in which members suggest, request for new laws/proposals’, (3) *issue* ‘raise problems in general which need attention’ and (4) *blame* defined as ‘blaming the government or the opposition government or policies’ (Rohit & Singh, p. 3, 2018). The authors state that a participating speaker’s statement containing a position will enter at least one of these categories. By concentrating on these categories, semantic features contained in the corpus indicative of one of the four categories simplified identification and coding of stances. These are examples of coded statements fitting each category:

1. **Appreciation:** „Wir begrüßen die Mitgliedschaft Finnlands und auch bald Schwedens in der NATO, weil dies die Sicherheit Deutschlands erhöht.“¹⁰

Joachim Wundrak (AfD) – (06.07.2023 – Tagesordnungspunkt 10 ‚Den NATO-Gipfel in Vilnius zum historischen Wendepunkt für europäische Sicherheit und transatlantische Lastenteilung machen‘)

¹⁰ Bundestag. (2023). *Plenarprotokoll 20/115* [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20115.pdf>

Translation: ‘We welcome the membership of Finland and soon also that of Sweden in NATO, because this increases Germany’s safety’

- 2. Call for action:** ‘Schweden und Finnland können dazu beitragen. Als Willkommensgeschenk sollte die Bundesregierung den vielen Worten endlich Taten folgen lassen. Das Ziel muss sein, die Bundeswehr zur kampfstärksten Armee Europas aufzubauen und Führung zu übernehmen.’¹¹

Rüdiger Lucassen (AfD) – (08.07.2022 - Zusatzpunkt 23 ,Gesetzes zu den Protokollen zum Nordatlantikvertrag über den Beitritt der Republik Finnland und des Königreichs Schweden ‘)

Translation: ‘Sweden and Finland can contribute. As a welcome gift, the government should finally act on their words. The goal must be to build the Bundeswehr into the most powerful army in Europe and to take leadership’.

- 3. Issue:** ‘Der Preis, den Schweden, Finnland und die gesamte NATO für den Beitritt gegen die Kurdinnen und Kurden an die Türkei zahlen müssen, ist zu hoch. Deshalb habe ich meiner Fraktion nun geraten, doch mit Nein zu stimmen. Ich weiß, dass auch andere Abgeordnete dies alles kritisch sehen – aber die Fraktionsdisziplin.’¹²

Dr. Gregor Gysi (Die Linke) – (08.07.2022 – Zusatzpunkt 23 ,Gesetzes zu den Protokollen zum Nordatlantikvertrag über den Beitritt der Republik Finnland und des Königreichs Schweden ‘)

Translation: ‘The price that Sweden, Finland and the whole of NATO must pay for accession, to Turkey against the Kurds is too great. That’s why I’ve suggested party to vote no. I know that other officials see this critical also – but the party discipline’.¹³

- 4. Blame:** ‘Allein Russland die Schuld dafür zu geben, ist falsch. Gerade auch der Westen hat zur Destabilisierung beigetragen. Trotzdem sind wir uns einig, dass der völkerrechtswidrige Krieg Russlands gegen die Ukraine scharf verurteilt werden muss.’

Dr. Gregor Gysi (Die Linke) – (07.09.2022 – ,Auswärtiges Amt - Einzelplan 05 ‘)

¹¹ Bundestag. (2022). *Plenarprotokoll 20/48*. [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20048.pdf>

¹² Bundestag. (2022). *Plenarprotokoll 20/48*. [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20048.pdf>

¹³ Bundestag. (2022). *Plenarprotokoll 20/50* [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20050.pdf>

Translation: ‘To blame Russia alone is wrong. Particularly the west also has contributed to the destabilisation. Despite that we can agree that Russia’s war in violation of international law against Ukraine must be judged harshly’.

Within Onyimadu et al., where a sentiment analysis on parliamentary debates was performed, the authors employed the use of an annotation lexicon in identifying positive and negative sentiment, specifically by means of ‘intensifying adverbs’ and ‘comparative adjectives’ (2014, p. 49). While an emphasis on syntactic clues assisted the authors in measuring the levels of emotions behind the speaker’s utterance, it offered little value in detecting the stance of a speaker. As a result, this study alternatively implemented the examination for semantic modality clues, to identify the exact location within the speech segment where the stance is expressed. The researcher gathered from Rohit and Singh (2018) that the call-for-action annotation category represented the vast majority of their annotation. The coding process for this study was therefore assisted by the examination for modality or modal expressions included in a speaker’s utterance. Modality stands for the ‘devices which allow speakers to express varying degrees of commitment to, or belief in, a proposition’ (Saeed, 2003, p. 135). With the exception of the regular formal government statements (*Regierungserklärungen*), to which the other party leaders respond, the speeches the data was predominantly collected from were in fact responses to propositions made by the various parties.

Linguists agree that modality comprises of two types: (1) *deontic* and (2) *epistemic modality*. The former is understood as an expression of the speaker’s desire for the necessity of a person or an object to perform or not perform an action a certain way (Winiharti, 2012). Instead of ‘necessity’ or an obligation, the latter on the other hand refers to possibility, probability or impossibility (Kreidler, 1998, p. 241). The usage of both was highly important to this study and identified through the frequent utilisation of modal verbs such as:

- ‘Can, could, may, might, will, would, must, should, ought, need, have to, have got to’ (Kreidler, 1998, p. 240)
- (*‘Kann, könnte, mag, wird, würde, muss, soll, braucht’*)

It is important to note, that the identifying of modal expressions was not impacted by the corpora language being in German. As it can be seen in the sample speech segments above for

(2) under ‘call for action’ via the verb ‘must’ (*muss*) was used in a similarly indicative manner. The application of both modality types has been shown by previous literature as a profound instrument of stance expression, with deontic modality in particular the clearest reflection of the speakers’, and ultimately, the parties’ values (Xu, 2015). This finds particular accentuation due to the nature of the relationship between the research, its main concept populism and the independent variable in times of crises. As discussed in the theoretical framework, populism’s inclination to be led by a charismatic figure, is accompanied by its need for direct communication, in representing the people’s urge for action against the oppressive elite. Equally under crisis conditions, as the systemic failures of society evoke anxiety among the public, opposition party leaders are required to explicitly communicate the party’s stance in addition to how little they have in common with the ruling coalition (Tuttnauer & Wegmann, 2022). The inclusion of modality types as indicators of stance expression have thus proven to be highly beneficial in the coding of the chosen corpora and the invoking of stance.

The second phase of the coding process involved creating two codes for each of the chosen policy topics marked by ‘pro’ or ‘anti’. The coded segments were assigned according to their position expressed into the respective stance code.

- Example: ‘Mandatory vaccines pro’, ‘Mandatory vaccines anti’ (*‘Impfpflicht Pro’*, *‘Impfpflicht Anti’*)

In order to avoid misrepresentation of results, an annotated segment from a speaker could only be coded once into one policy topic. The purpose of this was to prevent a distortion of results through highly opinionated speakers that expressed their stance on the same policy topic repeatedly, in comparison to speakers that addressed various aspects in their speech yet only expressed their stance just once. Instead, that same speech segment including an expression of stance made on several policy topics was able to be assigned into a variety of codes.

- Example: „Die Rettung der deutschen Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft kann nur über **das schnelle Ende des Lockdowns** kommen, nicht über verfassungswidrige massenhafte Bürgerrechtseinschränkungen, nicht über unbezahlbare Dauersubventionen, nicht über Coronasteuererhöhungen, nicht über Massenquarantänen und keinesfalls über

unzureichend getestete Impfungen oder gar über eine faktische **Impfpflicht**, die wir **kategorisch ablehnen**¹⁴

Peter Boehringer (AfD) – (8.12.2020, Bundesministerium der Finanzen, Einzelplan 08)

Translation: *„Rescuing the German economy and society can only come via the **end of lockdowns**, and not via unconstitutional, widespread civil right restrictions, not via unpayable subsidies, not via covid tax hikes, not via mass quarantines and under no circumstances via insufficiently tested vaccines, or via **mandatory vaccinations which we categorically reject**”*

- **Codes:** (a) Lockdown anti, (b) Mandatory vaccination anti
- **Annotation category:** ‘Call-for-action’

¹⁴ Bundestag. (2020). *Plenarprotokoll 19/197* [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/19/19197.pdf>

Results

‘In diesem Sinne, liebe Genossinnen und Genossen: Auf in den Kampf! Venceremos!’ – ‘In that sense, dear comrades: Into the battle! Venceremos’ (Gerhard Schröder, SPD, 2017, speech at the party congress prior to the 2017 general election)¹⁵

Annotation Category Coding

In accordance with the applied coding process, the researcher will firstly address the utterances made, by distinguishing under which annotation category their statement fell under. Alongside its function in simplifying the identification of stance expressions, the collected results from the annotation categories lend an insight into the use of language employed when a speaker states their position.

Table 1a: Results of annotation category coding frequencies for Ukraine War crisis speech segments

<u>Ukraine War Crisis</u>	Call-for-action	Issue	Blame	Appreciation	Total
AfD	75	32	11	5	123
Die Linke	46	24	6	4	80
Total	121	56	17	9	203

¹⁵ Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). (2017, June 25). *Protokoll des außerordentlichen Bundesparteitages Dortmund 25. Juni 2017*. Retrieved from https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Bundesparteitage/Bundesparteitag_2017/Protokoll_aoParteitag_Dortmund_25062017.pdf

Table 1b: Results of annotation category coding frequencies for Covid-19 crisis speech segments

<u>Covid-19</u> <u>Crisis</u>	Call-for- action	Issue	Blame	Appreciation	Total
AfD	82	29	8	2	121
Die Linke	45	9	3	8	65
Total	127	38	11	10	186

As expected, a strong majority of coded speech segments were labelled as a ‘call for action’ statement. These statements were mostly found as concluding remarks at the end of the speaker’s speeches to highlight and reaffirm their stance. Out of the 389 annotated segments from both crises 248 were categorised as a ‘call- for-action’ utterance (63.75%), in other words expressions of actions to be taken. This reflects a high frequency of deontic modality and a high usage of modal verbs, evoking moral and ‘value-based’ responses to a proposition, which is in contrast to epistemic modality, representing ‘knowledge-based’ positions (Kreidler, 1998, p. 143-144). The observed high proportion of deontic modality has not only been indicative of two populist parties urging to express their decisiveness and concrete positions, it also reintroduced the centrality of morality in populism. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018) outlined its vital services to populism, morality is the fuel of the dichotomy of the ‘pure people and corrupt elite’ (p. 11) and thus, moralisation of political debates is crucial to the populist agenda. The usage of verbs discovered upon running a frequency query of all coded segments represented this further in the verbal lexicon visible in table 2.

Table 2: Verbal lexicon of the most annotated verbs

Most frequently used verbs from annotated segments in order to express stance
must (<i>müssen</i>), will (<i>werden</i>), have (<i>haben</i>), need (<i>brauchen</i>), want (<i>wollen</i>), demand (<i>fordern</i>), end (<i>beenden</i>), reject (<i>lehnen(-ab)</i>), can (<i>können</i>), give (<i>geben</i>)

A recurring trend among anti-establishment rhetoric utilised by populist parties is to discredit and direct blame towards the incumbent parties, while highlighting their policies as a viable alternative (Kollberg, 2023). Accordingly high as a result were expectations for annotations labelled as ‘blame’ to produce greater numbers. Although a mere 28 out of 389 (7.19%) speech segments had been labelled as ‘blame’, this simply indicates that in expressing their stance towards a proposition, speakers had not blamed another party within the annotated segment. However, the examined corpora included repeated references of blame aimed at the coalition parties and both AfD and Die Linke against one another. As noted previously, due to the collected data having been conditioned by times of global crisis, expectations for positive sentiment expressed would be very low, as was the case for the ‘appreciation’ annotation category with 19 out of 389 segments (4.88%). Societal turmoil in the form of physical restrictions and business closures for Covid-19, or rapidly increasing energy costs and potentiality of a third World War were unlikely to yield a significant number of appreciative utterances. Instead, as stated by the earlier referenced Moffitt (2016), they perform the turmoil and produce incendiary rhetoric in propagating the crisis to their benefit. Lastly, segments labelled as ‘issue’ accounted for 94 out of 389 (24.16%) annotations and were expected to produce the category with the second most collected stance, thus no unexpected results had been discovered.

Stance Analysis Coding

After allocating all speech segments into their appropriate code stance, the results were interpreted in terms of their thematic categories as mentioned previously: (1) policies concerning **direct measures** in response to the crisis, (2) **domestic policies** related to the crisis, (3) **foreign policy** topics and (4) category reserved for one extraordinary thematic category which for the Covid-19 crisis became **vaccines** and for the Ukraine War crisis became **energy**. All policy topics included in the mentioned categories are described in detail in appendices 2a and 2b. In order to evaluate stance convergence between the AfD and Die Linke utterances, the researcher approached the measurement by matching a pair, consisting of two similarly expressed stances with equal codes, counting as convergence instances (CIs). This was done to regulate the bias of the greater speaking time allocated to AfD party members during plenary sessions. Moreover, the researcher aimed to bring particular attention to the extent of agreement on topics, rather than purely numerical values characterising the frequency of utterances. Hence the reason why a consistent overlap across the various categories was considered the prime indicator for strong results. With convergence being recognised at minimum, if all policy topics within one of the thematic categories display agreement. This criterion was applied as all selected policy topics are either directly related to the crises, or were a consequential discussion point in light of the crises' effects. Thus in order to detect a causal relationship between stance convergence and times of crises, this study aimed to create a framework that is indicative of consistent convergence along a variety of topics, at minimum within the same field. The two tables below illustrate the results of the coded speech segments divided into thematic fields and subcategories of policy topics. The numerical values at the bottom represent the total number of detected CIs used to determine the extent of convergence between both parties.

Table 3a: Results of speech segment coding for the Ukraine War crisis case study presenting a disproportionately high number of CIs related to the ‘direct measures’ policy topics.

Direct Measures	Domestic Policies	Energy	Foreign Policies
Training of Ukrainian Soldiers	Temporary 0% VAT	Russian Energy/Nordstream 2	EU Accession Moldova
(Heavy-)Weaponry/Taurus Deliv.	National Disarmament	Nuclear Energy	EU Accession Ukraine
Economic Sanctions Russia	Added Bundeswehr Budget (100bn)	Russian Energy Embargo	NATO Acc. Sweden & Finland
Diplomatic Solution To War	Social Welfare Increase	Energy Tax Cuts	Influence Of NATO
Sanctions Against Russian Elite	Heating Law	Gas Pricecap	US Troops in Germany
Total: 29	Total: 8	Total: 6	Total: 4

Table 3b: Results of speech segment coding for the Covid-19 crisis case study displaying a low frequency of CIs across all policy topics.

Direct Measures	Domestic Policies	Vaccines	Foreign Policies
Free Testing	Employer Provided Masks	Mandatory Vaccinations	EU Own Resources Sys.
Lockdown	National Debt Regulations	EU Vaccine Co-operation	EU Recovery Fond
Covid-19 Rapid Tests	Social Security Package	Mand. Vacc. Care Workers	EU Loans
2G,3G Status	Supply Chain Law	Vaccine Patent Sharing	Intern.Humanit. Covid Aid
Corona Warning-App	Declaration of epid. state	Digital Vaccination Pass	Influence Of The WHO
Total: 2	Total: 3	Total: 7	Total: 1

Based on the total scores presented in tables 3a and 3b, in addition to the individual policy topic scores (see appendices 3a and 3b), the coded speech segments scored a disproportionately high number of CIs for ‘direct measures’ of the Ukraine War (29) and scores ranging from (1-8) in

all other thematic categories of both case studies. As mentioned previously, these scores were calculated based on matching pairs of equally coded individual speech segments from each party, counting towards one CI. However, as this study aimed to investigate consistency across various topics, despite the presence of CIs within each thematic category, none produced consistent convergence throughout all policy topics. This was best observed under the mentioned ‘direct measures’ policy topics of the Ukraine War in table 3a (and appendix 3a) with CIs observed for ‘(Heavy-) Weaponry/Taurus Delivery’, ‘Economic Sanctions Russia’, ‘Training of Ukrainian Soldiers’ and ‘Diplomatic Solution to War’, and not for ‘Sanctions Against Russian Elite’. Similarly, despite converging on the Covid-19 pandemic policy topics ‘Digital Vaccination Pass’, ‘Mandatory Vaccinations’ and ‘Mandatory Vaccinations for Care Workers’ in table 3b (and appendix 3b), no convergence was detected for ‘EU Vaccine Cooperation’ and ‘Vaccine Patent Sharing’. These findings were consistent with the remaining thematic categories, of which none presented convergence across all policy topics. Upon evaluating these findings the applied stance analysis carried out for the AfD and Die Linke therefore yielded insufficient indication for a causal relationship between the two variables.

Generally, the pandemic displayed very little overlap of stances, indicated by the lack of consistent agreement in any of the thematic fields. The lowest level of convergence could be observed across the field of foreign policy, where AfD speakers stood firmly against any means of EU financial aid strategies, as they were seen as threats to national economic sovereignty, with inflation of debt for German taxpayers. Policies promoting increased efforts towards international humanitarian Covid-19 aid was similarly condemned in order to protect German interests first under the crisis conditions existent at the time. Convergence did however occur on the topic of an EU Own Resources System, as Die Linke party rejected any potentiality of austerity measures for European states to boost Brussels’s budget (see appendix 3b). Similarly minimal convergence could be observed under ‘direct measures’ as Die Linke felt apprehensive to challenge the purpose of restrictions imposed under Angela Merkel, as well as those imposed by Olaf Scholz after he was elected chancellor. As described by Müller (2021), the party struggled to propose definitive arguments during the pandemic and fell into line with the wider opposition of criticising the execution of Covid measures, without offering alternative initiatives. Thus the only clear evidence of Die Linke bringing emphasis to a specific policy topic came through the promotion of giving access to vaccine patents globally as a mechanism to reduce overall Covid-19 cases. Müller continued to highlight this, referencing the 2021 party convention in Thuringia where the party decided via member vote majority to pursue

mandatory vaccinations, with then co-chair Sarah Wagenknecht expressing repeated skepsis publicly (2021). Not only was the irresolution evident from this study's results, as five stances collected were in opposition of mandatory vaccines and just one in favour. Tove Soiland (2022) of the far-left news publisher 'Neues Deutschland' labelled the party division as a post-ideological totalitarianism, where logical doubts in civil rights restrictions and questioning of science and vaccines from within the party would face vehement condemnation by the party leadership. The results at hand lacking a clear party line by Die Linke evidently translate this and are therefore not compatible with the prior addressed hard line AfD speakers maintained throughout the pandemic.

Equally reflected by the collected speech segments, AfD annotated utterances with an opposing stance against lockdown restrictions resulted in the highest number of coded stances. While this endorses Brubaker's take on the mentioned pandemic paradox, it is a clear contrast to the stances expressed by Die Linke speakers. Closely followed by a strong stance against mandatory vaccinations, party members regularly appealed to personal liberties and small businesses being the true victims of the pandemic at the hands of state politics. Despite a strong imbalance of stances on 'direct measures' and 'Vaccines', convergence was observed in stances against the digital vaccination pass implementation, against mandatory vaccines for care workers and the general public, as well as being in favour of Rapid Covid-19 Tests. Nonetheless, in examining a potential causal relationship between the presence of a crisis and a uniform populist strategy, the low level of convergence on responses to the impacts of Covid-19 has been a significant property of both AfD and Die Linke's policy line during this crisis. The findings from the domestic policy topics equally displayed little agreement, with three CIs recorded solely due to convergence in opposing the declaration of the national epidemic state.

The 2022 Ukraine War crisis results contained the greatest extent of overlap, with stance convergence observed in all but one policy topic of the 'direct measures' category. The consensual rejection of all kinds of arms deliveries to Ukraine found repeated condemnation from both parties, with CIs scoring the highest under this policy. With similarly high results for seeking a diplomatic solution over negotiations with Putin and opposing the training of Ukrainian soldiers in Germany, such convergence was certainly expected considering the findings by Bersenev (2022). She concluded that the pursuit of a favourable relationship with Russia is advantageous for both, although for different reasons.

Results of the stance analysis for the policy topics on sanctions support Bersenev's findings as both parties spoke strongly against economic sanctions against Russia. Nonetheless, only Die Linke were in favour of sanctioning individuals considered as part of the Russian elite, including wealthy oligarchs, and leading political figures. Suggestions from Bersenev's conclusion described the AfD's reasons for supporting Russia-friendly policies, as a consequence of admiration for Putin's style of leadership and his rejective position on a US-led hegemony (2022). And this opinion resonates with party voters in the former East German states whose experience post-reunification under western influence seems to have produced a natural affinity for this rejection. Links to Russian leadership are no novelty to AfD members, with party leader Tino Chrupalla having met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in 2020 (Schmidt, 2020) (Lembcke, 2021). This explains why positive ties to decision makers are of strategic interest and would face jeopardy if sanctions were to be supported by AfD members. Die Linke referred to their rejection of economic sanctions regularly and explicitly on the grounds that ordinary Russian citizens would suffer from their effects, leading to their subsequent support for sanctions targeted at high-ranking individuals only. The previously mentioned party history of Die Linke maintains positive sentiments towards Russia also notably through its older voters. Therefore, one may suggest that the convergence observed under 'direct measures' indicates agreement based on several factors: The anxious narrative of a nuclear World War potential and the hypocrisy of a leftist warmongering German coalition were instrumentalised regularly in speeches by both parties to promote their policy. Thus indications that a propagation of a crisis took place are present, which aligns with the addressed populist performance of crisis as Moffitt argued (2015). Moreover that it was used to suit the strategic goals of each party individually, leading to a converging stance based on the speech segments collected.

While on a smaller scale, results from the 'Foreign Policy' category hint further at the instrumentalization of crisis conditions as both AfD and Die Linke oppose the prospective accession of Moldova and Ukraine into the EU. The risk of war due to their geographical and cultural proximity to Russia was a repeated point of reference. Yet AfD speakers keenly expressed their support for Sweden's and Finland's NATO accession, with real potential for confrontation along the latter's extensive border with Russia. Former party leader Alexander Gauland clarified in a speech on 08.07.2022 that this expansion of European partners may finally shift the balance of bargaining power away from the US with the accession of both

states. Which as mentioned by Bersenev (2022) is a strategic goal of the AfD, and the results reflect further potential convergence from the narrative of crisis conditions.

Energy related policy topics were expected to produce stance convergence, due to their sensitivity, of either being in favour, or against Russia and the potential subsequent impacts to German population. Thus the observed agreement on rejecting a Russian energy embargo was foreseeable, as speech segments from both parties highlight that Germany would carry the exorbitant price hikes caused by the embargo. This study expected significantly greater agreement on the parties' solutions, as the AfD strongly sided with a revival of all Russian gas imports and using the Nordstream 2 pipeline. While stance agreement occurred, Die Linke more favoured a state-regulated energy price cap instead. Additionally, they offered no support for a heavily AfD proposed reinstatement of Germany's nuclear power plants as energy alternative. As seen in appendix 3a, the domestic policy category did highlight convergence on all topics except 'Social Welfare Increase'. This exception was expected and reflected previously via the MARPOR database coding the manifesto by Die Linke with 518 references for a 'welfare state expansion' and the AfD manifesto with 7 references seeking 'welfare state limitation'. Contrastingly, the temporary suspension of VAT on certain goods and the rejection of the proposed heating law displayed convergence, since annotated speech segments expressed desire for extensive protectionism of ordinary citizens' financial welfare. The scores of the 'Added Bundeswehr Budget (100bn)' policy, requires further context as CIs were recorded for an opposing stance by both parties. Nonetheless, the opposing stance expressed by AfD members was directed towards the additional debt burden from the added defence budget, otherwise the added finances were principally welcomed in the strengthening the German military. Consequentially, this contributed towards the domestic measures policies displaying inconsistent and limited evidence of agreement between both parties in this category.

As final layer to the applied methodology, the legislative rollcall voting results (see appendices 1a & 1b) gathered within the same timeframe showcased a mixture of implications relative to the collected from the stance analysis. Policy convergence from the legislative votes was interpreted as the majority of both parties voting for the same outcome, whether in favour or opposition, with abstentions not considered. Such convergence took place 8 out of 15 times for motions and bills related to the Ukraine War crisis and 10 out of 21 for the pandemic crisis. Convergence from the roll call votes showcased greatest consistency to the stance analysis

results on bills related to defence policies such as the proposed support package for Ukraine, approval of the special defence funding and the constitutional amendment required to pass the funding (appendix 1a). Interestingly, a proposal suggested by the AfD was rejected by all parties including Die Linke. A continuation of this trend became evident across the remaining votes, and equally for the Covid-19 roll call voting, as the parties never converged on each other's proposals. Whenever convergence did occur, it took place exclusively in opposition of to the coalition parties (CDU & SPD before 2021 election; SPD, FDP & Bündnis 90/Die Grünen after 2021 election). This was consistent with Stecker (2018) who noted that challenger parties which are permanently in opposition are naturally less inclined to corroborate government legislation through votes. While this may be indicative of party discipline voting, there was no further evidence to prove this. Therefore, purely considering the accuracy of the stance analysis, these results offered limited verification of this method. Particularly as not all discussed topics necessitated a legislative voting procedure. Furthermore, the option to abstain from the vote complicates gathering a complete comparison to compliment the primary analysis. Parties among other reasons utilise the option to abstain from voting even in agreement with a proposed bill, as even noted by some of the speakers in the analysis. This occurs in events with minor interest conflicts not aligning with the party's core voters, or simply due to party discipline, in an instance where a party cannot accept it, but also a rejection could send misleading signals. Thus an abstention becomes the most viable alternative. However, with the exception of legislative votes surrounding defence related topics and their stance on nuclear power, the voting results did not present itself as a suitable comparative framework due to a lack of data related to the wide range of policies addressed in the stance analysis.

Limitations

Although working with parliamentary text data presupposes an often transparent and simplified effort to collect data, limitations related to the entire paper including this section posed a number of challenges to this study. As stated, the collection of data for the stance analysis comprised of examining a large number of plenary protocols. Selecting the documents relevant to the study ranging from a timespan of 17 months to 33 months, amounted to 95 annotated files. Within this range, the session days with the most frequently discussed debate topics relevant to the study were chosen and analysed. Despite that, the applied process of textual analysis of parliamentary speeches for this paper displayed a possibility, speakers will have

addressed relevant topics or expressed relevant opinions, regardless of the motion topic being relevant to the crisis. Taking for example stances collected in favour of, or against lockdowns of the Covid-19 case study. Based on the coding process of this experiment, there is a reasonable likelihood several utterances had been made during debates not directly crisis related. Taking into consideration sectors such as agriculture and tourism which struggled immensely during the pandemic for example, where speakers are likely to have addressed their opinion on restrictive policies. This study cannot confirm that every stance uttered across the complete corpora was collected, as financial resources for additional annotators on this study were not available. However a significant amount of care was taken to generate a complete representation of information as possible.

Besides the previously addressed lack of legislative voting across the selected categories, another limitation is related to the consistency of the collected stances. Party discipline that may have impacted the legitimacy of this study is an inherent obstacle difficult to avoid in the analysis of observational data of party strategies (Kollberg, 2023). The legislative voting results were indicative of such behaviour as the subject parties never sided with the coalition and only did so when opposing the stance of their counterpart. On the other hand, instances during the stance analysis where an opinion was detected, yet where the same speaker states that their party will nonetheless abstain from the vote was a challenge that had to be mitigated. Encounters of such instances, where no utterance could be assigned an annotation category, but an intention to abstain was present, there was no data collected. However, this led to discrepancies in the verification of the stance analysis by means of the roll call results where convergence may have taken place over speech but not through votes.

Conclusion

The early stages of this research project casted doubts over the feasibility of this study, as the arguably two most incompatible parties were being tested for inherent and consistent agreement of stance over a certain time period and under extraordinary conditions. As mentioned in the related works section, a similar study does not exist, and thus presented itself as a scientific niche that has evolved into a phenomenon this study set out to examine. In doing so, this thesis asked the research question to what extent times of crises lead to stance convergence of two populist parties on opposite ends of the left-right spectrum. This was accompanied by the proposed hypothesis stating that ‘in the presence of global crises, populist parties AfD and Die Linke express stance convergence in their parliamentary speech’.

As the results lacked a clear correlation between the selected independent variable in (times of global crises) and the dependent variable (stance convergence of Die Linke and AfD), only partially has the research question been answered. The extent of convergence relies on this study’s results of the stance analysis performed under the category of ‘direct measures’ of the Ukraine War case study. The relevant stances collected may point towards a joint affinity towards Russia as primary ground, yet when in context, Russia is one of the two war-parties. And the convergence is taking place strongest under policies tasked with mitigating the effects and ultimately ending the crisis. Thus while this study does not disqualify the crisis as main instigator for the stance agreement recorded, grounds to claim full correlation are insufficient, as the trail leads to the populist nature of both parties. The analysis of the Covid-19 crisis case study displayed a similarly insufficient image. Because despite evidence of populist strategies employed by both parties, the grave conditions of that time period did not lead to a coming together of the parties, not out of strategic opportunism nor ideologically via populism. While this case study was approached differently by the subjects, the mere existence of a global crisis alone showed no correlation to a convergence of stance.

When addressing the interpretation of the primary analysis, the researcher mentioned evidence of Moffitt’s steps populist party’s take as part of the opportunistic strategy to utilise crises for political gain. Numerous references have been made throughout this paper referring to the Russia friendly policies both parties regularly engage with, which certainly precede both crises. Therefore, based on the background of this policy area and a consistent convergence pattern

only recorded here, both populist parties share a pre-existing Russia-friendly stance. Which with the help of the crisis conditions and opportunistic populist strategy, became the forefront of their convergence. Nonetheless, as the only outlier for repeated and consistent stance agreement, in answering the research question, the extent is minimal and lacks a strong causal relationship due to the unique and historically deep context of how the convergence occurs. Moreover, this reintroduced the significance of the aforementioned thin-centred populism, as it attaches itself to any given ideology it requires to achieve its goals. This characterised the AfD narrative as one maintained its strong opinions as a challenger party, against the status quo, even in the most uncertain of times during the pandemic. It also characterised Die Linke as a not 'authentically left-wing party' seeking to attach its populist ideology to a favourable stance on Russia, while maintaining its impression as a modern and progressive leftist party (Bersenev, 2022, p. 56). As for the proposed hypothesis, this study utilised utterances from party members themselves that expressed a favourable or opposing stance on specifically selected topics. In testing this hypothesis, the selected policy topics showcased similarities of stance for the specified parties, however the recorded results were characterised by inconsistencies across both case studies, which has led to an unsuccessful hypothesis. The goal of this study was to detect convergence by means of stance, where the previously referenced definition of the verb to converge emphasised on coming from different places to meet at a particular place. And while this study guaranteed that the subject parties came from different places, it could not provide sufficient evidence of the parties meeting, nor the conditions they would meet under.

In concluding this paper, this study makes important contributions to academia and society. It does so by implementing a manual approach to opinion-mining and the analysis of parliamentary discourse, without the use of computational methods. While the majority of texts applying a similar methodology originate from computer science and NLP fields, this study has utilised on a mixture of elements. The successful application of the annotation categories by Rohit & Singh (2018) provided a simplified approach to manual labelling and the identification of stance utterances. The incorporation of legislative votes, party manifests, modality and speech segments have been essential instruments to this paper, displaying different levels of effectiveness, but confirming the versatility of insights parliamentary data can offer. As a result, the researcher has filled an academic gap bridging these approaches to a purely social science study and the limited resources it was conditioned by. Moreover, the subsequent findings provide a suitable starting point for further research on political behaviour

under modern crisis conditions. Thus the theoretical framework section compiled an up-to-date review of literature on populism and crisis principally important in capturing early perspectives of populism in comparison to the modern-day publicised standing it has attained.

The societal contributions this paper adds to the societal awareness of how political actors strategize during vulnerable times, in addition to emphasising the functions of parliamentary speeches. Analyses such as the one presented in this paper improve public understanding the involved proceedings in ‘the approval or rejection of laws, agenda setting, political cycles’ (Almeida et al., 2021, p. 338). The detailed process of accessing this data in this paper, raises the importance of speeches as a transparent and trustworthy medium, prospectively enhancing public awareness, especially with the German general election ahead in 2025. The encountered transparency of the data collection may facilitate a growing trend of directly accessing parliament documents for public information and distinguishing parties on their stance. Furthermore, the provided literature review of populism as a concept and its practical application separate from its media coverage allows readers to remove the defamatory intentions from its objective qualities. In addressing how these qualities overlap with times of crises, this paper contributes to the public understanding of the people-centric philosophy and how this directs the manner in which policies are reasoned.

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Appendices

Appendix 1a: List of legislative roll call vote results within the selected time range for the Ukraine War case study, where ‘+’ represents ‘yes’, ‘-’ represents no, and ‘/’ represents ‘abstained’.

<u>Results of legislative roll call votes</u>	<u>AfD</u>	<u>Die Linke</u>	<u>FDP</u>	<u>Bündnis 90/Die Grünen</u>	<u>SPD</u>	<u>CDU</u>
<u>Energy Policies</u>						
7. Juli 2022 Sofortmaßnahmen für einen beschleunigten Ausbau erneuerbarer Energien (Gesetzentwurf)	-	-	+	+	+	-
22. September 2022 Änderung des Atomgesetzes (Gesetzentwurf AfD)	+	-	-	-	-	-
11. November 2022 Weiterbetrieb deutscher Atomkraftwerke bis zum 15. April 2023	/	-	+	+	+	-
1. Dezember 2022 Vorgezogener Braunkohle-ausstieg im Rheinischen Revier	-	-	+	+	+	+
15. Dezember 2022 Energiepreislösung (Strompreislösung)	/	/	+	+	+	-
15. Dezember 2022 Energiepreislösung	-	/	+	+	+	-
20. April 2023 Gesetzes zur Änderung des Energiesicherungsgesetzes	-	-	+	+	+	-
28. April 2023 Änderung des Atomgesetzes	+	-	-	-	-	-
7. Juli 2023 LNG-Beschleunigungsgesetz	-	-	+	+	+	-

8. September 2023 Gesetzentwurf Gebäudeenergiegesetz	-	-	+	+	+	-
10. November 2023 Änderung des Atomgesetzes	+	-	-	-	-	-
<u>Defence Policies</u>						
28. April 2022 Umfassende Unterstützung für die Ukraine	-	-	+	+	+	+
3. Juni 2022 Grundgesetzänderung (Artikel 87a)	-	-	+	+	+	+
3. Juni 2022 Sondervermögen Bundeswehr	-	-	+	+	+	+
3. Juni 2022 AfD-Antrag zum "Sondervermögen Bundeswehr"	+	-	-	-	-	-

Appendix 1b: List of legislative roll call vote results within the selected time range for the Covid-19 pandemic case study where ‘+’ represents ‘yes’, ‘-’ represents no, and ‘/’ represents ‘abstain’.

<u>Results of legislative roll call votes</u>	<u>AfD</u>	<u>Die Linke</u>	<u>FDP</u>	<u>Bündnis 90/Die Grünen</u>	<u>SPD</u>	<u>CDU</u>
<u>Health Policies</u>						
18. November 2020 Corona-Maßnahmen (epidemische Lage)	-	-	+	+	+	+
29. Januar 2021 (AfD antrag) Normenkontrolle Bevölkerungsschutzgesetz	+	-	-	-	-	-
4. März 2021 Epidemische Lage von nationaler Tragweite	-	-	-	-	+	+
21. April 2021 Bevölkerungsschutzgesetz (Gesetzentwurf)	-	-	-	/	+	+
6. Mai 2021 COVID-19-Schutzmaßnahmen-Ausnahmenverordnung	-	+	/	+	+	+
11. Juni 2021 Fortbestehen der epidemischen Lage	-	-	-	+	+	+
25. August 2021 Epidemische Lage von nationaler Tragweite	-	-	-	-	+	+
10. Dezember 2021 Impfpflicht für bestimmte Berufsgruppen und weitere Änderungen im Infektionsschutzgesetz	-	/	+	+	+	+
10. Dezember 2021 DIE LINKE-Antrag: Prämie für Beschäftigte im Gesundheits- und Pflegesystem	-	+	-	-	-	-
18. März 2022 Änderung des Infektionsschutzgesetzes	-	-	+	+	+	-
7. April 2022 AfD-Antrag: Keine Impfpflicht gegen COVID-19	+	-	-	-	-	-
7. April 2022 Impfpflicht ab 60	-	-	-	+	+	-

19. Mai 2022 AfD-Antrag: Einrichtungsbezogene Impfpflicht abschaffen	+	-	-	-	-	-
8. September 2022 Neufassung des Infektionsschutzgesetzes	-	-	+	+	+	-
10. November 2022 Änderung des Infektionsschutzgesetzes (2.Beratung)	-	-	+	+	+	-
<u>Labour Policies</u>						
16. Dezember 2020 Arbeitsschutzkontrollgesetz	-	+	-	+	+	+
10. November 2022 Einführung des Bürgergeldes	-	/	+	+	+	-
25. März 2021 Eigenmittelsystem der EU	-	/	+	+	+	+
<u>Economic Policies</u>						
17. Dezember 2020 Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz	-	-	-	-	+	+
11. Juni 2021 Lieferketten	-	/	-	+	+	+
<u>Foreign Policy</u>						
25. März 2021 Eigenmittelsystem der EU	-	/	+	+	+	+

Appendix 2a: Detailed description of selected policy topics for analysis of the Ukraine War case study

<u>Policy Topic</u>	<u>Details</u>
Sanctions against Russian Elite	Imposing sanctions aimed specifically at Russian leadership and oligarchs and other key individuals.
(Heavy-) Weaponry/Taurus Deliveries	Delivering weapons including heavy weaponry such as tanks and Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine.
Economic Sanctions Russia	Imposing sanctions against key economic sectors and organisations of Russia.
Diplomatic Solution to Conflict	Demanding a solution to the conflict through peace talks with Russian leaders.
Training of Ukrainian Soldiers	Allowing Ukrainian soldiers to receive military training by the Bundeswehr.
Temporary 0% VAT	Demanding the rate of value added tax to be reduced to 0% on certain goods.
National Disarmament	Downsizing the capabilities of the Bundeswehr.
Added Bundeswehr Budget (100nb)	Demanding the added 100 billion euros special funding for the Bundeswehr in response to potential Russian threat.
Social Welfare Increase	Increasing the national social welfare rate to counter inflation.
Heating Law	Demanding the replacement of old radiators that do not produce 65% of their heat using renewable energy.
Russian Energy/Nordstream 2	Importing energy from Russia, including via the Nordstream pipelines.
Nuclear Energy	Reinstating the production of nuclear energy in Germany.

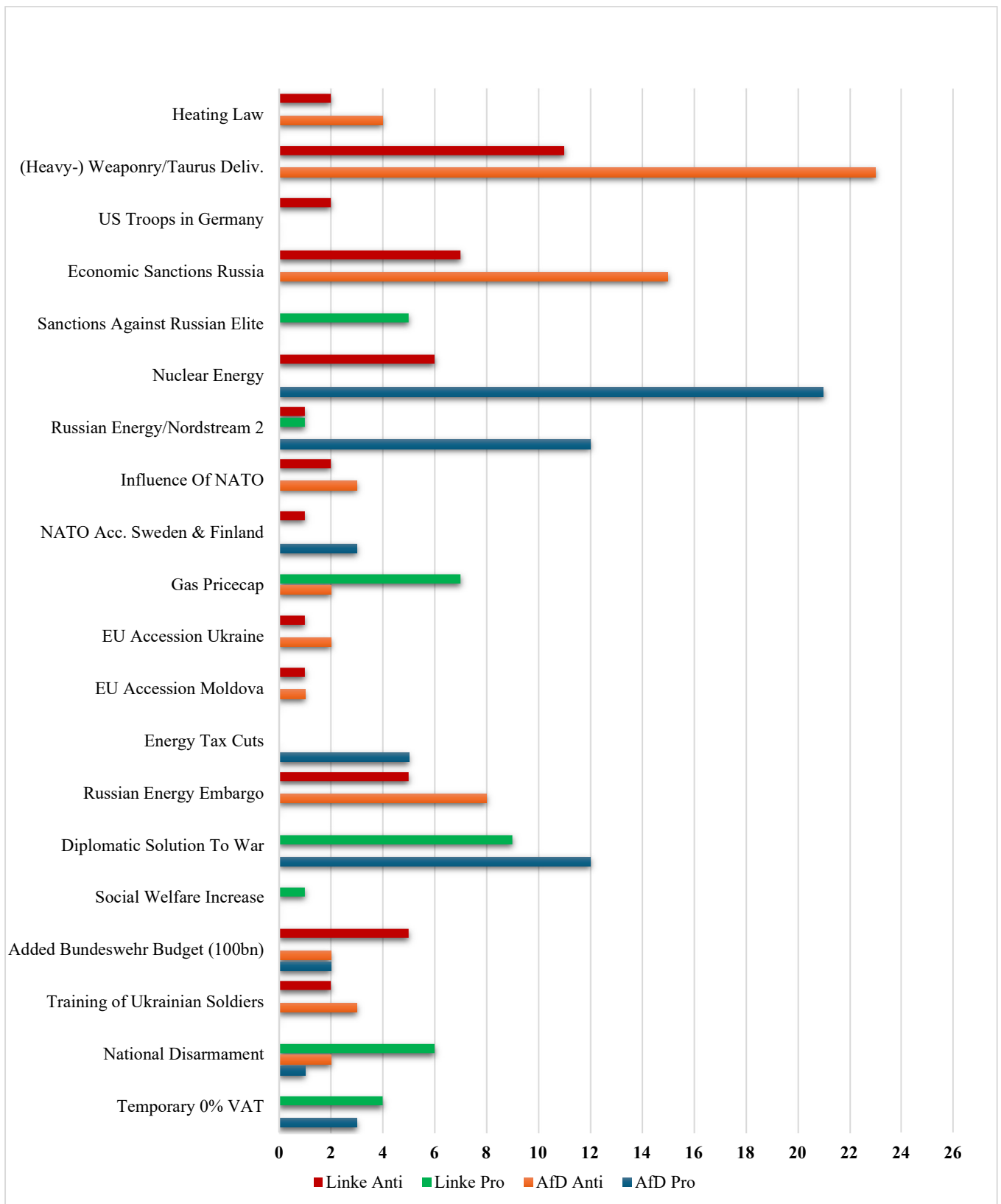
Russian Energy Embargo	Imposing an embargo on imported gas and oil from Russia.
Energy Tax Cuts	Cutting taxes on private energy consumption costs.
Gas Price cap	Setting a national price cap on gas consumption.
EU Accession Moldova	Moldova accessing the European Union.
EU Accession Ukraine	Ukraine accessing the European Union.
NATO Accession for Sweden & Finland	Sweden & Finland accessing NATO.
Influence of NATO	Utilising NATO guidance on defence and foreign policies.
US Troops in Germany	Keeping US troops stationed in Germany.

Appendix 2b: Detailed description of selected policy topics for analysis of the Covid-19 pandemic case study

<u>Policy Topics</u>	<u>Details</u>
Free Testing	Providing free Covid-19 tests to the public.
Lockdown	Imposing lockdown measures to curb the spread of the pandemic.
Covid-19 Rapid Tests	Introducing Covid-19 rapid tests to the public.
2G, 3G Status	Demanding only individuals that qualify for 2G/3G status to be allowed to enter public facilities or events.
Corona Warning-App	Introduction of the Corona Warning-App to track infections numbers within close distance of an individual.
Employer Provided Masks	Supplying Covid-19 masks to workers provided by employers.
Social Security Package	Easing access to the public to receive social benefits to tackle effects of the pandemic.
Supply Chain Law	Demanding businesses to monitor their global supply chains to counter the effects of the pandemic on environment responsibility and human rights abuses.
Declaration of Epidemic State	Declaring a national epidemic state in order to pass restrictive measures against Covid-19.
Mandatory Vaccinations	Imposing mandatory vaccinations on the public against Covid-19.
EU Vaccine Cooperation	Sharing vaccine capabilities gradually with members of the EU.
Mandatory Vaccinations for care workers	Imposing mandatory vaccinations specifically for care workers to mitigate risks of infection to vulnerable individuals.

Digital Vaccination Pass	Introducing a digital form of a vaccine pass/card.
Vaccine Patent Sharing	Sharing patents of vaccines globally with developing countries to tackle the pandemic.
EU Own Resources System	Reforming the EU's own resources system to raise additional funding.
EU Recovery Fund	Raising funding for an EU recovery plan to tackle expenditure and debt linked to the pandemic.
International Humanitarian Covid Aid	Increasing efforts to provide humanitarian aid to developing countries to tackle global effects of the pandemic.
Influence of the WHO	Utilising on information and statistics provided by the WHO for guidance in tackling the pandemic.

Appendix 3a: Results of stance analysis for individual policy topics related to the Ukraine War case study.



Appendix 3b: Results of stance analysis for individual policy topics related to the Covid-19 pandemic case study.

