

CULTURAL HEGEMONY & IDEOLOGY FORMATION

*Analysing the impact of right-wing rhetoric on
climate discourse in Germany*



Hamburg, 19.6.2024

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PROBLEMATIZATION

PROBLEMATIZATION

RESEARCH CONTEXT



Alice Weidel 
@Alice_Weidel

Die Bundesregierung gibt Milliarden für die Illusion aus, das Klima beeinflussen zu können - doch zur Absicherung realer Gefahren ist kein Geld da! #DeshalbAfD #AfD

Translated from German by Google

The federal government spends billions on the illusion of being able to influence the climate - but there is no money to protect against real dangers! #DeshalbAfD #AfD



Portland Moderate.
@pdxmoderate

Climate Change is a lie promoted by the rich to keep the poor poor.

Every thing they say is to keep the poor poor. What have they done to be rich. Do people realize there are so many more of us and we let these evil weirdos that got picked on all of their lives , tell us what to do and rob us. I've about had enough of this nonsense

PROBLEMATIZATION

CULTURE WARS



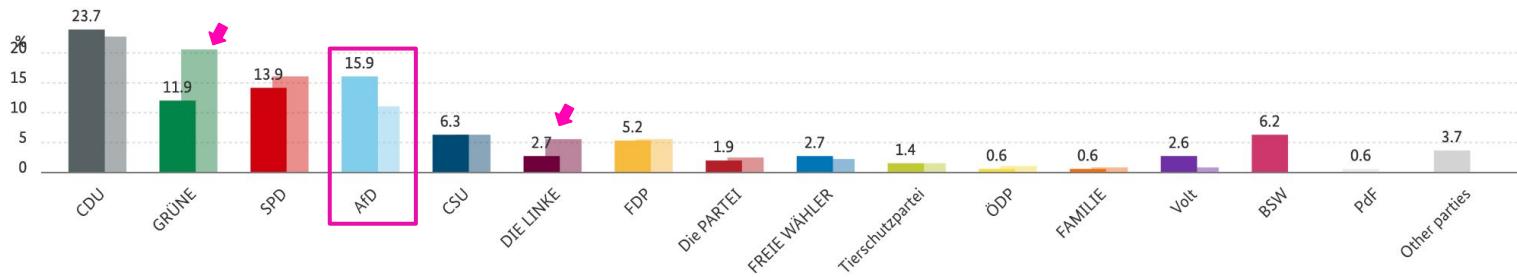
PROBLEMATIZATION

SOCIAL SEGREGATION



Votes

European Parliament election 2024, Germany
Provisional result



■ European Parliament election 2024

■ European Parliament election 2019

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SVG

THE ROLE OF SCIENCE & THE LEFT

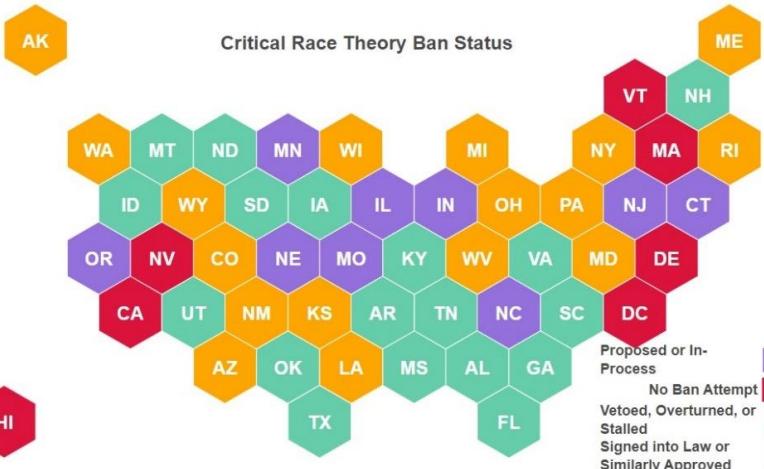


PROBLEMATIZATION

RIGHT-WING RHETORIC

- neither scientific nor left-leaning beliefs take hold in society
- social sciences and left-wing discourse as a “boogeyman” of the right
- weaponizing of left wing concepts like
 - a. CRT, Gender, Identity Politics, Environmental Sciences

Critical Race Theory Ban States [Updated April 2023]





PROBLEMATIZATION

DISCOURSES & AIM

CASE

PHENOMENA

science skepticism

post-truth

radicalization online

resurgence of the far right

right-wing rhetoric

right-wing populism

CLIMATE BREAKDOWN

DECREASE IN RELEVANCE

CONCEPTS

social transformation

ideology formation

unity out of difference

cultural hegemony





RESEARCH QUESTION

How does right-wing rhetoric on climate discourse contribute to the formation of a specific ideology in Germany?

Research AIM

- Uncover right-wing rhetoric's role in political success
- Identify mechanisms of ideology formation
- Understand impact of right-wing rhetoric and adaptation strategies

CONTEXT

- Right-wing discourse on climate crisis in Germany



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

POPULISM

“(...) an ideology which assumes that society is divided into two homogeneous, antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite'" (C. Mudde, 2019)



The Great Unsettling

"Globalization is now at its most disjunctive phase in human history."

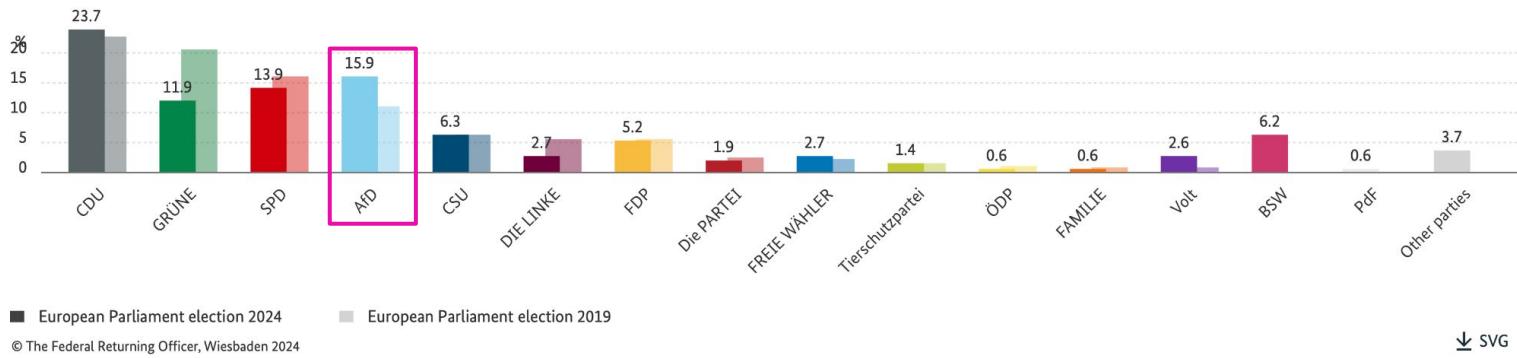
"The multiple disjunctive relationships that have developed among and within these formations shape not only the morphology of the contemporary globalization system but also cast a long shadow on its future dynamics."

(M.B., Steger & P. James, 2020)

Votes

European Parliament election 2024, Germany

Provisional result





ANTONIO GRAMSCI

1891 - 1937



General Facts

- non-mechanical Marxist
- sociologist, linguist, philosopher
- founding member of the Italian Communist Party
- Political activist
- Formed part of the factory occupations in Turin
- Imprisoned under Mussolini in 1926

THEORY

WHAT IS



COERCION

CONSENT

CULTURAL HEGEMONY





THEORY

Cultural hegemony

supremacy of the ruling class manifests itself in two distinct ways:

- **coercion**
- **intellectual or moral leadership**

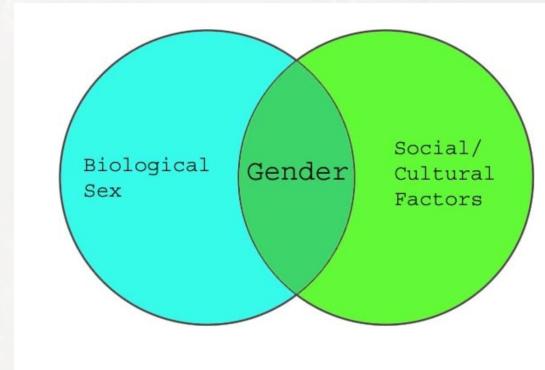
ideology formation is a process in constant movement, not “*a coercive instrument of the ruling class*” (Hall, 2016, p. 163)

cultural hegemony = rule by consent to the structures and modes of oppression

the values of the ruling class are constructed within the subject



HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?





THEORETICAL FRAME

SUBALTERNS

- dominated social groups
- each group may experience different degrees of subalternity
- the unification of subaltern groups / classes is the vehicle for sustainable social transformation

QUOTES

"(...) all non-ruling classes; thus involves groups that are not fully marginalized but have stakes in the status quo" (Gramsci, 1977: 1722–3; 1992: 92)



THEORETICAL FRAME

COMMON SENSE

GOOD SENSE

- critical, embodied and practical understanding
- potentially derived from work environment/ education
- expertise

COMMON SENSE

- chaotic, incoherent
- spontaneous philosophy of everyday life

good sense and common sense are historically situated and can only be understood historiographically

"diffuse, uncoordinated features of a general form of thought common to a particular period and a particular popular environment" (Gramsci 1971:330)

"intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond common sense and become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception" (Gramsci 1971:333)

A successful ideological movement can only come about

*“when in the process of elaborating a **form of thought superior to common sense** and **coherent on a scientific plane**, it never forgets to remain in contact with the simple and indeed finds in this contact the source of the problems it sets out to study and resolve.*

“(…) it must be a **criticism of common sense**, basing itself initially, however, on common sense.”



THEORETICAL FRAME

ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL

- all humans are intellectuals
- not all have the social function of an intellectual
- someone with a professional standing within a certain social strata
- a social organizer

QUOTES

"Every social group (...) [creates] organically, one or more stratal of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields." (Gramsci, 1971, Q12 §1, p. 5)



THEORETICAL FRAME

PIECING IT TOGETHER

organic crisis of capitalism

"revolution without revolution"

GLOBALIZATION

CLIMATE BREAKDOWN

struggle to maintain cultural hegemony

FASCISM fills the void

perverts truth and facts
to foster an us vs the
cultural elite narrative

social science & the left fail
to offer a robust alternative

transformative ideas are not
anchored in the common sense
of "the people"

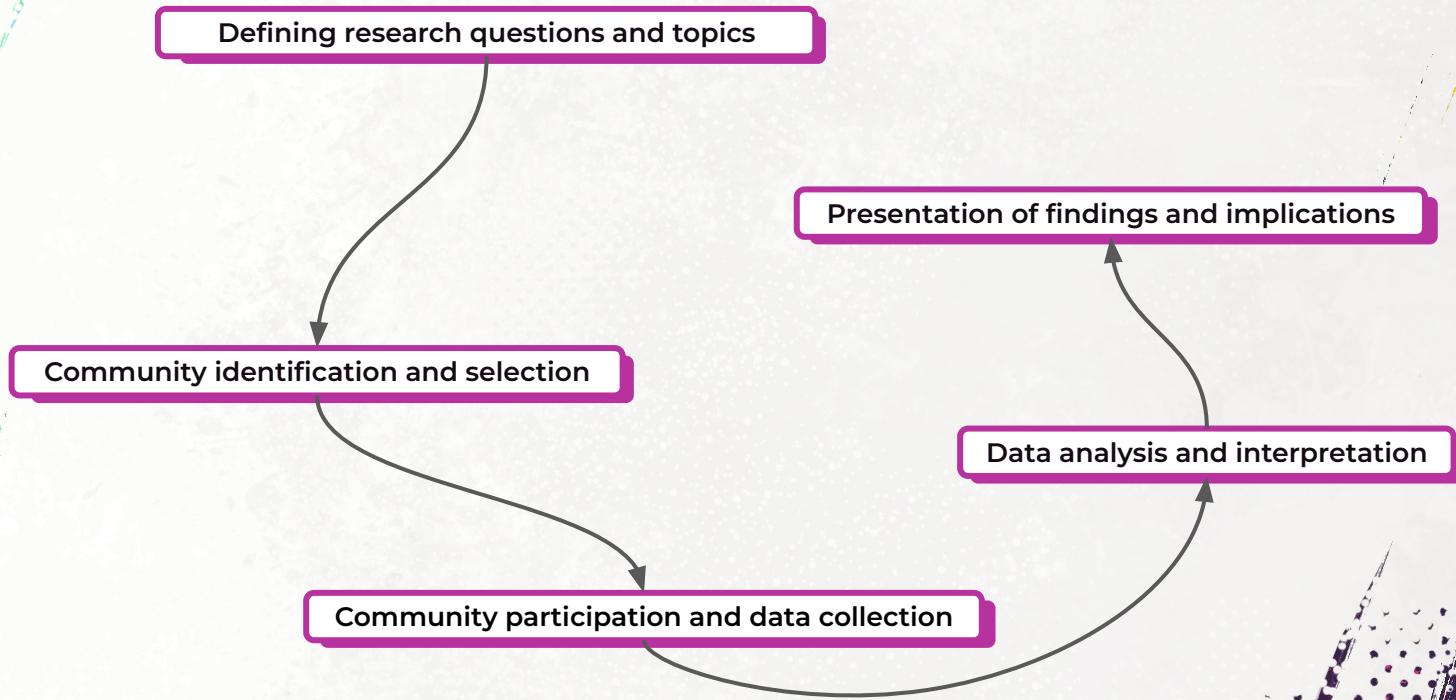


METHODOLOGY



METHODOLOGY

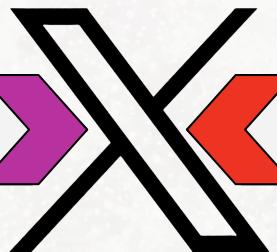
NETNOGRAPHY PROCEDURE





Advantages

- 1 Access to a vast number of publicly available tweets pertinent to the research questions
- 2 Ability to capture a wide range of political perspectives on climate change
- 3 Opportunity to study the interaction between textual tweets and multimedia content (photos, videos, links)



Limitations

Research is confined to tweets related to particular hashtags or accounts

Right-wing rhetoric on Twitter can be exaggerated by bots and organized efforts



- 1
- 2

Tweets might not accurately represent the views and opinions of German citizens

- 3



METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Method

Archival Data

Elicited Data

Field Note Data

Framework

Government to Citizens

Citizens to Citizens

International Discourse on Climate Skepticism

Approach

1. Search for Political Party Accounts

2. Find Specific Politicians

3. Identify Relevant Hashtags and Keywords

4. Observe Media Account Discussions

5. Organize and Validate Data

Energiewende Klimawandel ClimateAction
ClimateSkepticism
ClimateChange Klimaskepsis Umweltschutz
EnvironmentalProtection CarbonTax
FridaysForFuture Denialism
Klimaleugner GlobalWarming RightWing AfD
GreenNewDeal C02Steuer
EnergyTransition Rechts
Klimakrise

METHODOLOGY

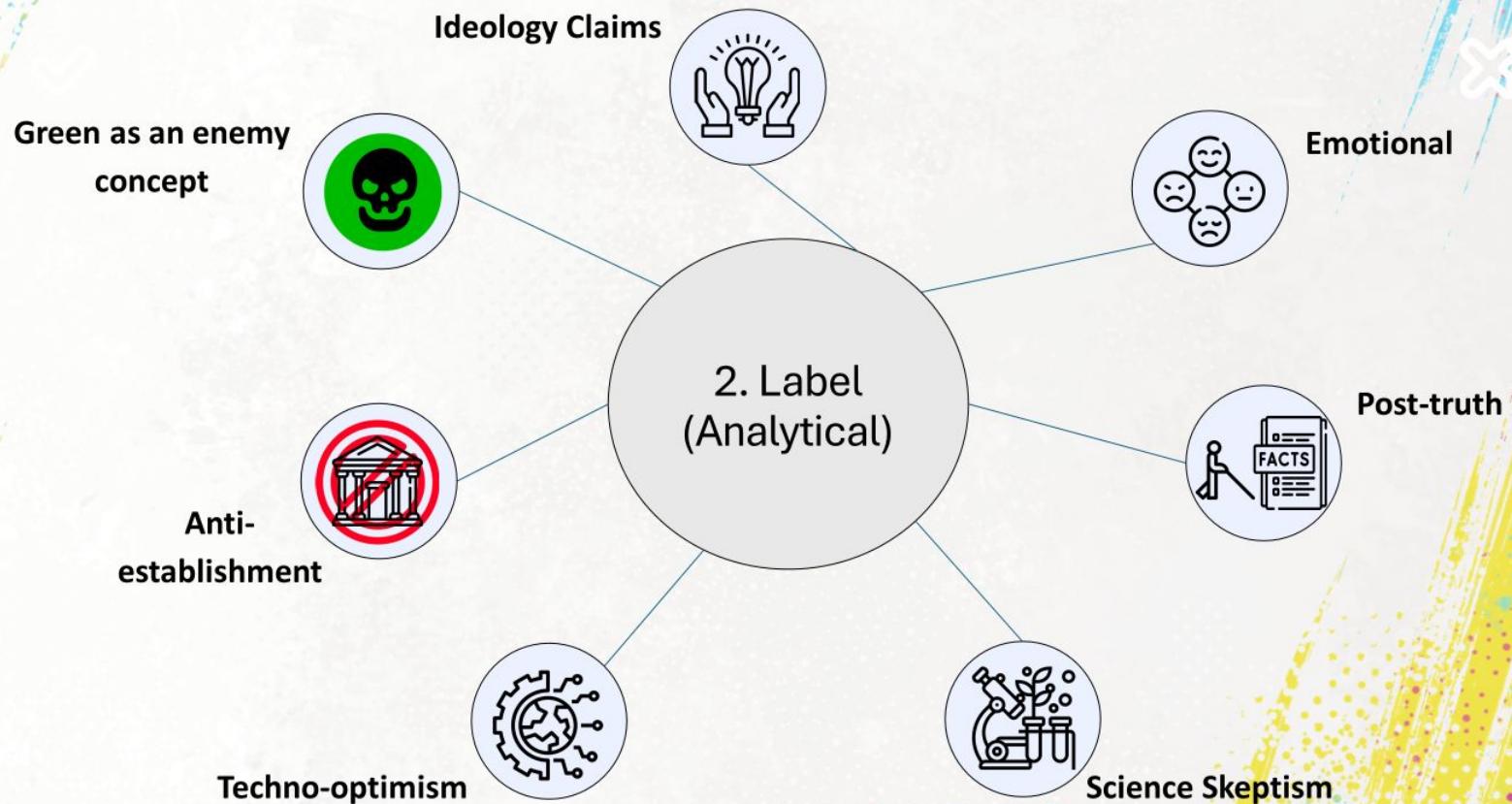
DATA PROTOCOL

Code	Statement (original Language)	Statement (English translation)	Additional Notes	Community/ Group	Data Type	Date Range	Keywords/ Hashtags	1. Label (intuitiv)	2. Label (analytical)
1	Gebildete Menschen wissen das. Die die es nicht wissen, sind bei den Grünen gelandet.	Educated people know that. Those who don't know have ended up with the Greens.	Comment under the Post of Code 3	/	Tweet	19.05.24	/	Elitist thinking	

ANALYSIS

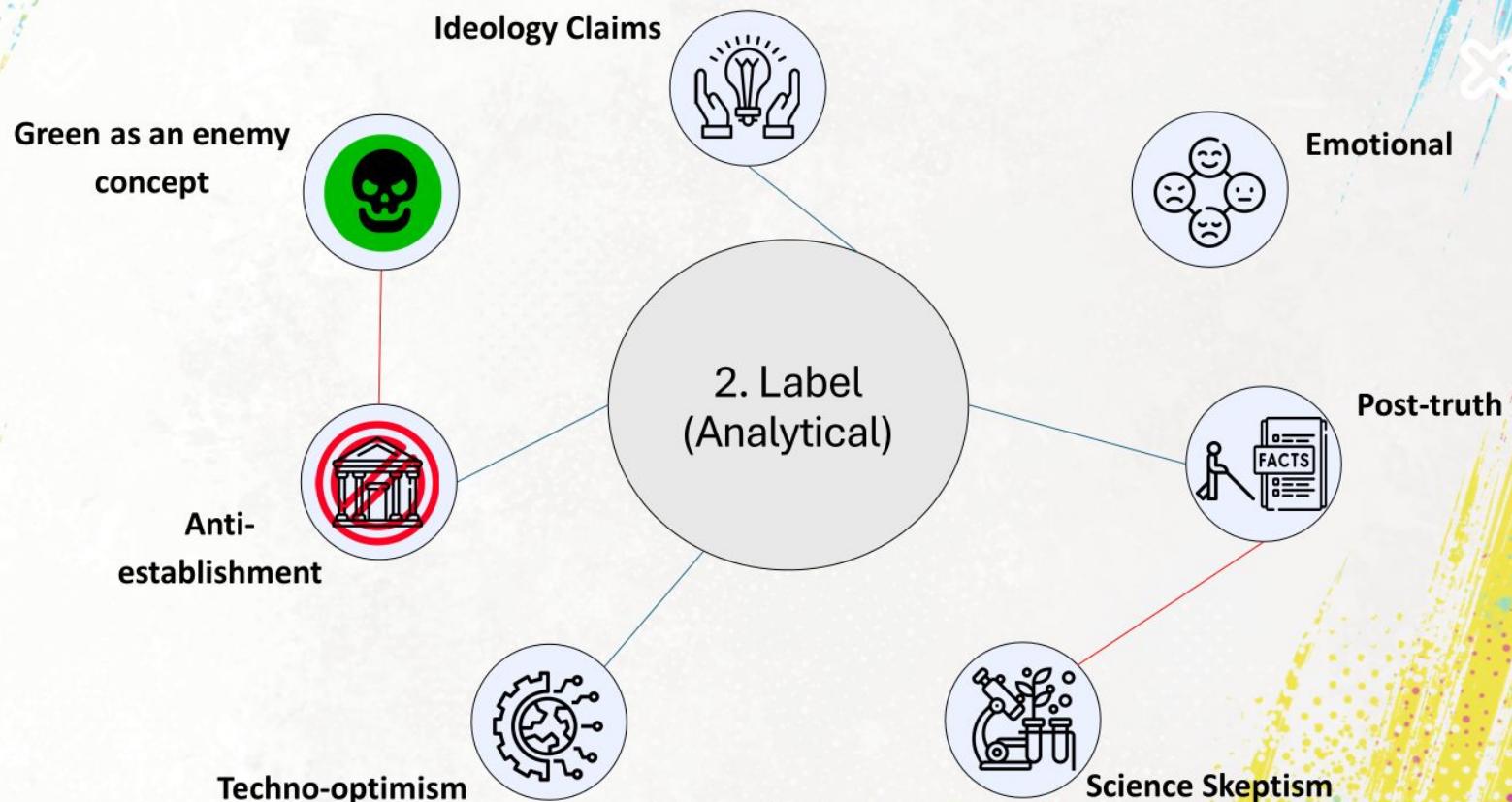
ANALYSIS

2. LABELING



ANALYSIS

2. LABELING



ANALYSIS

DATA PROTOCOL EXAMPLES

Code	Statement (original Language)	Statement (English translation)	Additional Notes	Community/ Group	Data Type	Date Range	Keywords/ Hashtags	1. Label (intuitiv)	2. Label (analytical)
6	Gebildete Menschen wissen das. Die die es nicht wissen, sind bei den Grünen gelandet.	Educated people know that. Those who don't know have ended up with the Greens.	Comment under the Post of Code 3	/	Tweet	19.05.24	/	Elitist thinking	Anti-establishment
11	Wer stoppt endlich die Klima-Lügen, die Klima-Hysterie und vor allem die Klima-Sekte? Genug ist genug, diese radikalen Faschisten haben in keiner freien Gesellschaft etwas verloren #nurnochAfD #Stolz	Who will finally stop the climate lies, the climate hysteria, and above all the climate sect? Enough is enough, these radical fascists have no place in a free society #onlyAfD #Proud	/	/	Tweet	30.06.23	#nurnochAfD #Stolz	Call against climate discourse	Post-truth

ANALYSIS

DATA PROTOCOL EXAMPLES

Code	Statement (original Language)	Statement (English translation)	Additional Notes	Community/ Group	Data Type	Date Range	Keywords/ Hashtags	1. Label (intuitiv)	2. Label (analytical)
48	Hoffentlich für eine demokratische Partei? Also AfD oder BSW? NICHTS ist gefährlicher für die Demokratie ist die menschenverachtende Ideologie des Klima Totalitarismus...	Hopefully for a democratic party? So AfD or BSW? NOTHING is more dangerous for democracy than the inhumane ideology of climate totalitarianism...	/	/	Tweet	07.06.24	/	Danger to democracy	Ideology-claims
51	Unser Kandidat für #Europa: Dennis Radtke „Wirksamer #Klimaschutz geht nur mit der Industrie als Partner und nicht als Gegner!“	Our candidate for #Europe: Dennis Radtke "Effective #climate protection can only be achieved with industry as a partner and not as an opponent!"	/	/	Post	03.06.24	#Europa #Klimaschutz	Industry partnership	Techno-optimism



ANALYSIS

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. The tweets express significant **frustration and anger**, reflecting a genuine **disbelief** in climate change. Many believe that the Green Party's policies will **unnecessarily decrease their quality of life**.
2. Right-wing rhetoric often uses **everyday examples** to "prove" climate change isn't real. The **lack of visible effects** in Germany and the **complexity of scientific data** make these **simplified arguments** seem more convincing to their audience. By focusing on observable phenomena and anomalies, these arguments appeal to common sense, making them more relatable and persuasive to skeptics.
3. There is a **clear distinction** between **far-right AfD supporters** and more **centrist-right CDU voters**. While the former dismisses **climate change as a hoax**, the latter acknowledges it but criticizes the Green Party's approach, viewing **climate change as manageable** and **secondary to economic concerns**.



MAIN TAKEAWAYS

Many of the tweets by right-wing activists appeal to **common sense**, which “identifies the exact cause, simple and to hand” (Gramsci [1971](#): 419).

Here it translates into a narrative on the state/bureaucratic or academic **elites** and left-wing politicians who **are uninterested in German people's lives**, concerned only with the climate or migrants' well-being, and, as such, are to blame for the problems the **real inhabitants** are facing.



CONCLUSION

LABELS & THEORY

LABELS

anti-establishment

ideology-claims

techno-optimism

post truth

THEORIES

cultural singularity

"Caserism" & cultural singularity

organic crisis

common sense



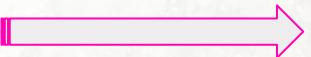
OUTLOOK

DISCUSSION

cultural hegemony

neo-liberal hegemony of capital potentially at an end -> populism is an illiberal democratic response to democratic illiberalism

[populism - symptom for an organic crisis of capitalism]



organic crisis

populism not a temporary phenomenon but related to structural social changes i.e. the economic and cultural devaluation of the former middle and new under classes

fascism



social change

social change

ideological project of unifying the subalterns by developing a "robust alternative"



organic intellectuals

common sense

"the intellectuals must be instrumentalized in order to produce the subaltern intellectual, in order to produce a proletarian intellectual who is unmarked by a prejudice against the subaltern." (Spivak, 2012)



[the challenge is thus to develop a practical philosophy out of the everyday lived reality of people by interweaving organic with traditional intellectuals good sense with commons sense]



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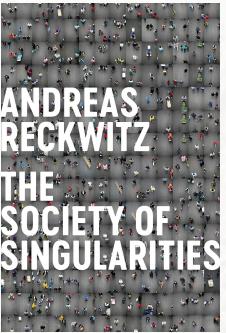


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OUTLOOK

DISCUSSION



[Reckwitz advocates the reconstruction of a general public sphere in which subjects from different classes and milieus of society come together.

state structures need to regain importance, which he introduces as *regulative liberalism*]

[Spivak is criticizing the intellectual west's "desire for subjectivity". > "research" or "knowledge" have served as a prime justification for the conquest of other cultures and their enslavement, as part of the European colonial project.]



THEORY

SYSTEM

1. **Cultural hegemony:** Understanding ideology formation and post-truth beliefs

2. **Discourse analysis:** Right-wing rhetoric and science skepticism

3. **Outlook / further research – Subaltern Studies:** Applying Gramsci to modes of resistance

A. Gramsci

Du Bois

C. Battaglini

Cas Mudde

De Cleen and Stavrakakis

A. Reckwitz

Spivak