



## DIMENSIONS OF POPULIST NETWORKED COMMUNICATION ABOUT MIGRANTS

### WYMIARY POPULISTYCZNEJ KOMUNIKACJI WIRTUALNEJ DOTYCZĄCEJ MIGRANTÓW

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#### ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to analyze how the German party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), defined as right-wing and populist, positions the issues of migrants in virtual communication. The conducted research (content analysis) encompassed posts published by the party in 2020 on Facebook. The results of the research revealed that migrants appeared in AfD messages in two contexts. They were presented as a source of various threats and their presence in Germany being the result of wrong political decisions. The affective dimension of communication is associated with emphasizing the risk related to crime and threats to the German national identity and cultural values that bind the community together. The political dimension, on the other hand, focuses on the criticism of the government, which, in the AfD's opinion, has taken poor decisions, which resulted in an uncontrolled influx of migrants.

**Keywords:** Alternative für Deutschland; Facebook; populist communication; migrants; AfD

#### ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest analiza sposobu, w jaki niemiecka partia Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), definiowana jako prawicowa i populistyczna, pozycjonuje problematykę migrantów w wirtualnej komunikacji. Przeprowadzone badanie (metodą analizy treści) objęło posty opublikowane przez partię w 2020 roku na Facebooku. Wyniki badań ujawniły, że migranci pojawiali się w przekazach AfD w dwóch kontekstach. Byli przedstawiani jako źródło różnych zagrożeń oraz ich obecność w Niemczech wynikała z błędnych decyzji politycznych. Afektywny wymiar komunikacji wiąże się z podkreśleniem ryzyka związanego z przestępczością oraz zagrożeń dla niemieckiej tożsamości narodowej i wartości kulturowych, które spajają wspólnotę. Z kolei wymiar polityczny skupia się na krytyce rządu, który zdaniem AfD podjął złe decyzje, co skutkowało niekontrolowanym napływem migrantów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Alternatywa dla Niemiec; Facebook; komunikowanie populistyczne; migranci; AfD

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## INTRODUCTION

The AfD party was established in Germany in February 2013, positioning itself as a Eurosceptic and then anti-immigrant entity (Grabow, 2016; Trauner & Turton, 2017). D. Rucht (2018) considers the AfD party to be clearly ideologically right-wing and populist. A similar stance is taken by M. Jankowski, S. Schneider and M. Tepe (2017) pointing to a clear ideological shift of the AfD from a Eurosceptic to a conservative-populist party. The research on the narrative conducted by the AfD emphasizes an anti-elitist, as well as strongly populist and nativist tone (Karakayali, 2018; Heidingsfelder, 2018; Donovan, 2020). As T. Lochocki (2018) points out, the message formulated by the AfD has clearly been rooted around the issue of resources and their allocation. After 2015, the party's interest in the migration policy increased, which was the direct result of the migration crisis in Europe. In the AfD program, the issue of migrants is positioned in several thematic areas<sup>1</sup>. The first and the most extensive one concerns the issue of asylum for refugees. The AfD emphasizes that the provisions of the German constitution are inadequate to reality, as they provide asylum guarantees for persecuted persons, but do not regulate the issue of migration for reasons other than asylum. The party's position regarding migrants is clearly expressed in the ban on their admission if the reason for migration is to take advantage of the German social system. In its program, the party draws attention to the need to verify asylum seekers, to the prohibition of family reunification and to the failure to maintain dual citizenship. The acquisition of German citizenship should only be inherited from parents. In this part of the program, the party emphasizes the growing costs of caring for foreigners who declare to be minors (this information, according to the AfD, is often not verified). This makes it possible to avoid going through the asylum procedure. Then, thanks to the family reunification procedure, persons declaring themselves as minors bring the remaining family members to Germany. The AfD's position focuses mainly on emphasizing the potential threat of a growing parallel society that shapes isolated Islamic communities living under Sharia law and thus negating the state's legal monopoly. At the same time, the party clearly emphasizes that it is not an Islamophobic or racist organization, and bases its position on rational arguments, i.e., criticism, which is to prevent radicalization of Muslims and the potential creation of sources of terrorism in Germany. In its program, the AfD points to the need to abandon the

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<sup>1</sup> AfD Political Program. (n.d.). Retrieved July 15, 2021 from: <https://www.afd.de/themen/>.

financing and exploitation of mosques by Islamic states and other foreign donors. According to the AfD, the language used in mosques should be German. Imams agitating against this solution should be unconditionally deported. The party also opposes the creation and operation of Islamic theological chairs in German universities and calls for a complete ban on face veiling in public, along the lines of the French. The issue of migrants has also been included in other thematic areas of the AfD's political program, i.e., education – state schools should not be able to teach the Muslim religion; healthcare – medical doctors and therapists should, if possible, be trained in Germany or have a very good command of the German language; social security – it is necessary to renegotiate the German-Turkish social security agreement of 1964, taking into account European social security agreements. As shown by the analysis of the AfD's political program, the issue of migrants is centered around taking care of the allocation of resources and eliminating cultural differences, especially those related to religious issues. The cultural axis of the division revealed in the program of the party is to awaken Germans' resentments by referring to the community and caring for its safety.

The research findings contained in the article are in line with the body of analyses of communication processes characterized by anti-immigrant messages, conducted by right-wing populist parties via the Internet media. The research conducted so far has shown that communication of such parties in different countries, despite many common features, also manifests a national character, referring to specific aspects of domestic politics (von Beyme, 2019). In the process of conceptualizing the research, the understanding of populism as a form of communication (not ideology) was adopted, the aim of which is to provide virtual users with information in a simplified manner, referring to emotions or the so-called "rational arguments", understood as commonly available knowledge, based on the so-called "common sense". The concept of nationalism in empirical analysis denotes its ethnic form, referring to culture and religion as those values that bind the community and influence the sense of national and cultural identity and belonging. Ethnic nationalism is at the same time preclusive, which justifies treating migrants as a part of society that does not belong to the community represented by the AfD.

## THEORETICAL OUTLINES OF THE TOPIC

Populism as a political phenomenon has been the subject of research for many years. Attention is drawn to the multiplicity of definitions of populism, at the same time emphasizing their imprecision, inconsistency, or too broadly accepted rules of definability (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969; Taguieff, 2005; Taggart, 2000; Canovan, 1981, 1982, 2002; Mény & Surel, 2002; Mudde, 2004; Jansen, 2011; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). In the article, populism is defined as a communication process, which places it among empirical research, as a project primarily devoted to qualitative analysis (see: Lipiński, 2017). As A. Lipiński and A. Stępińska (2020) prove, the growing importance of discursive or communicological approaches to populism results from three reasons: noticing the role of communication in constructing the political world; searching for justifications for the popularity of populist parties in the communication phenomena and the deepening process of mediatization of politics. Following the popularization of quantitative and/or qualitative research on the communicological approach to empirical research on populism considered as a style of communicating of political parties, it is assumed that parties (and their leaders) ideologically do not position themselves as populist entities but adopt such rhetoric using populism as a way of communicating. According to J. Jagers and S. Walgrave (2007), populism takes the form of a discursive strategy, style, or the use of communication mechanisms by various entities. The communicative dimension of populism results from the conceptualization of this phenomenon as a discourse analysis. At the level of the category, which the discourse is, T.A. van Dijk (2001) believes that the analysis of populism can take place in several dimensions: linguistic (the language used in specific contexts); social (as part of the interactions taking place); and cognitive (serving to convey ideas). Assuming the linguistic layer of the presented project as the dimension of empirical discourse analysis, three basic elements should be distinguished: affirmative references to the nation, criticism of the political elites and the exclusion of foreign groups treated as a potential or real threat. The concept of populism defined in the linguistic dimension is therefore based on anti-elitism and exclusion, the increasingly important subject of which is the migrant. R. Wodak (2015, 2017), paying attention to the construction of communities, emphasizes the importance of the created content that populists use in the political narrative they are building. Referring to the community, the potential risks that threaten that community are emphasized. According to Wodak, by creating the “policy of fear”, the community receives content that normalizes

exclusion through the use of sophisticated techniques such as native narrative, trivialization, or denying facts. When positioning populism in the discursive and communicological current, the use of the linguistic layer is emphasized as the one that shows the ability to create and not only describe reality. This means that by referring to the known and understood symbolism used in specific messages, it is possible to give it new social or cultural meanings. At this point, the non-verbal forms of transmitting information take on particular significance.

Populism in the linguistic layer uses verbal resources that actually create antagonism in the layer of political science: “us and them” in the meaning of “people” and the “elite”, and in the sociological layer: “us” and “them” in the meaning of social groups represented by us and by an alien/stranger – at the same time representing different cultural and/or religious values. The antagonism in the aspect of political science results from the vertical division into a “good” nation, which is not properly represented by the “bad” elite, who undertake faulty decisions, in the nation’s view. In sociological terms, antagonism is horizontal in nature – the social groups of “us” and “aliens” represent different social and cultural values, which is a potential threat to those values that unite the community that welcomes the “aliens”. Linguistic antinomies are both inclusive – they involve individuals by creating a nation or community, and exclusive – they justify the exclusion of aliens and/or strangers. The explanation of such activities results from the axiological approach to communication processes. What is identified as “nation”/“community” is marked by positive emotions while negative emotions are attributed to what means the other side – elite/strangers/aliens (Mény & Surel, 2002). Negativity, consisting in verbal hostility towards named objects or social groups and referring to the community created by entities sharing the same values, results from emotions which, as J. Heaney (2013) claims, seemingly do not appear in the political discourse of political parties. Rather, they are masked under more rationalistic symbols, such as interests or moral values. Excluding emotions is illusory, it takes place thanks to the apparent reference to rationality and avoidance of words expressing emotions directly. In political discourse, separating rationalism from inherently disordered emotions is a procedure that is assigned significant importance in formulating nationalist messages. For example, ethnic nationalism, which is exclusive/preclusive and irrational in nature, which confirms its emotionality, is considered a negative phenomenon, different from inclusive and positively perceived civic nationalism, referring to rational arguments. Identifying nationalism with emotions is perceived differently in the literature. Heaney (2013), while reviewing the relationship of nationalism

and emotions, distinguishes three approaches. The first is the identification of nationalism and emotions by which nationalism is viewed negatively as “mere sentiment”, or positively as a “collective feeling”. The second approach refers to the logic-emotions dichotomy, which reduces nationalisms to a distinction between civic (positive) and ethnic (negative) attitudes. Ethnic nationalism uses words with hidden emotional content. In the third approach, emotions are ignored, and the discourse itself refers to two types of nationalist ideals: “state security” and “collective feeling”. Security, resulting from the political organization of the state, means providing citizens with a sense of certainty and comfort, which corresponds to emotional patterns for patriotism and civic nationalism (Berezin, 2002; Heaney, 2013). The security of the state is related to the activities of its institutions, such as schools, the army, offices, and the symbolism that determines social and cultural practices. The second type of ideal – “community of feelings” – is non-institutional in nature and denotes a type of emotion that can generate support or opposition to politics (Berezin, 2002; Heaney, 2013). Emotions of a political nature are non-institutional, but at the same time they strongly affect individuals who form groups based on “communities of feelings” expressed in various political rituals and most often polarized towards representatives of different communities. The reference to national affiliation results, on the one hand, from satisfying the need for institutional security guaranteed by the state, and on the other, from the emotional community of feelings guaranteeing individuals belonging to groups that share the same values.

Populist communication is most popular in the space of social media, which is the main channel of communication between populist parties and the environment (Krämer, 2017; Lorenzetti, 2020). The growing importance of social media in political communication is also one of the important arguments proving the deepening processes of mediatization of politics (see: Hepp, 2013; Nowak-Teter, 2019). As a result of preliminary research, it was found that the number of fans of the AfD party on Facebook in 2020 was more than twice as large as that of other major German political groups and amounted to approx. 540,000 followers. For comparison, the number of people who watched broadcasts from other parties on the same service was: CDU (225 thousand); CSU (225 thousand); FDP (160 thousand); Die Grünen (81 thousand). This particular example proves that social networking sites have a significant influence on the development of populist movements. According to researchers of the phenomenon of populism in communication processes (see: Taggart, 1996, 2000, 2002; Taguieff, 2005; Laclau, 2005; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), the media play a key role in the growth of right-wing

populism. This is mainly due to the process of transforming politics into various forms of entertainment, which has been taking place since the 1980s. According to the concept of B. Moffit (2016), the media have a significant meaning as they are the vehicle and instrument for creating events that are used to transfer politics into everyday life. As emphasized by E. Bergmann (2018) and K. von Beyme (2019), the growing popularity of online media, especially social networking sites, leads to presenting problems in a simplified and one-dimensional way, directing messages directly to virtual communities. The migration crisis that took place at the turn of 2014 and 2015 triggered an increase in xenophobic sentiment and a rapidly growing criticism of the elite positioning themselves as culturally cosmopolitan. This resulted in a growth in the importance of parties that previously did not exist in the mainstream, and whose rhetoric allowed them to find simple answers referring to the knowledge of the “nation” and to the so-called “common sense”. Shaping and strengthening the attitudes of anti-elitism and collectivism in societies, as the basic elements of a populist narrative referring to the existing community, resulted in an enhancement in the popularity of the entities proclaiming it in Internet communication (Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016). Moreover, the fact that political parties communicate primarily through social media, enables them to reach all interested parties with the same, mediated proprietary message (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016; KhosraviNik, 2017). This way of communicating creates an impression of real concern for the fate of the “nation” that is the recipient of this content. Moreover, in the era of increasing polarization, which sets the tone for virtual discourses, the reference to culturally defined issues and leading to the relativization of general norms and values is used in the processes of virtual communication by referring to the so-called freedom of speech. The principle of “freedom of expression”, additionally fueled by apparent anonymity, gathers users primarily on these social media sites where radical statements are allowed and where truths referring to the “will of the nation” prevail (Watts, 2018; Sunstein, 2018; Markowski, 2019).

## RESEARCH PURPOSE AND METHOD

Since 2014, the problem of the migration crisis in Europe has been attributed to the policy implemented and, as is commonly believed, imposed on the EU countries by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The problem of migration has also become an issue of implementing the state’s internal policy, which for

the opposition was a framework for potential criticism of the goals and actions taken (Gerdt, 2020).

The research was carried out on Facebook, which in the case of the AfD is the primary channel of communication in virtual space (Medina Serrano et al., 2019). The party is actively communicating on the Internet using several available tools (Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Telegram). Since mid-2020, the AfD has also been producing podcasts, which are regularly shared on Facebook. Preliminary analysis has shown that of all the channels used by AfD, Facebook is the leading one in virtual communication. Hence, the analysis was limited only to the content of the AfD's Facebook profile, treating it as the primary channel of non-professional communication, through which the AfD presents their views about migrants. The research was carried out in 2020<sup>2</sup>, accepting as material for content analysis of all the posts that the AfD party published in the year under review and which concerned the topic of migration. As a topic of migration was treated each post where migrants were a subject as a person, as a group of people, or the word "migrant"/ "migrants"/ "refugee" was used to describe politics dedicated to the migrants. The research was carried out in several stages:

1. Regularly extracting all posts published by the AfD on the official Facebook channel of the party (<https://www.facebook.com/alternativefuerde>) concerning the subject of migrants.
2. The research was carried out by one researcher. It consisted in manual transferring the content of the posts to two sheets for independent data encoding, which took place regularly once a month. It was assumed that the time lapse between coding processes allows the results to be objectified by replicating the analysis on the same research material.
3. Categorization of posts was carried out by assigning each post on an exclusive basis to a specific thematic category. The initial research (carried out inductively by content analysis of published posts concerning migrants in two first months of research period) involving the recognition of the content of the AfD website allowed the identification of several categories to which posts were then assigned after analyzing the content. The following thematic groups were adopted: Migrants as a source of threat – the following threats were identified: A1 – cultural and religious

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<sup>2</sup> The 2020 was a unique pandemic year in the history. However, virtual communication of the AfD on Facebook was still concentrated on migrants. It confirms that the subject of migrants is important in the political communication of the AfD.



differences; A2 – migrant crime; A3 – failure to respect applicable law; A4 – threat to public finances through social assistance for migrants; A5 – illegal migration and obtaining asylum under false pretenses; B – inefficiency of the German authorities in managing the problem of migrants; C – protection of German identity and national values; D – society's lack of acceptance for increasing migration; E – other.

4. Making the categorization consisted in assigning each of the posts, taking into account the dominant subject matter, to specific thematic groups – the categorization was made twice, at monthly intervals, in order to eliminate the error of different categorization of the same post. When the second coding attempt gave divergent results in assigning a post to the same category, the post was added to the “Other” category. During the research, a total of eight posts caused discrepancies as to their unambiguous assignment to the same thematic category, which accounts for 3.35% of the total number of categorized pieces of content and did not significantly affect the obtained results.

In order to carry out the study, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. How does the AfD present migrants in their content on Facebook?

RQ2. What dimensions of communication about migrants are possible to indicate in the AfD's network communication?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table 1 shows the ratio of the total number of posts on the subject of migrants that the AfD published on its website on Facebook in individual months of 2020, in relation to the number of posts that presented migrants as a source of threat (without indicating what type of threat it was)<sup>3</sup>. In individual months, the percentage ranged from less than 17% to over 75%, and only in five months, the ratio fell below 50%. This means that the topic of threats caused by migrants is an important component of communicating about them.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2020, the AfD published on average 5 posts a day on Facebook, including posts concerning migrants. The frequency of posts dedicated to migrants was between one post every 3 days to one post a day. The research was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, which means that the posts concerning migrants are important in political communication of the AfD.

**Table 1.** List of Posts Published by the AfD in Individual Months of 2020

Months of the year 2020	Total number of posts about migrants	Number of posts presenting migrants as a source of threat	Percentage of posts presenting migrants as threatening in the total number of migrant posts
I	29	22	75.86%
II	25	8	32%
III	14	6	42.86%
IV	13	9	69.23%
V	10	7	70%
VI	14	11	78.57%
VII	15	10	66.67%
VIII	13	5	38.46%
IX	29	7	24.14%
X	38	23	60.53%
XI	27	15	55.56%
XII	12	2	16.67%

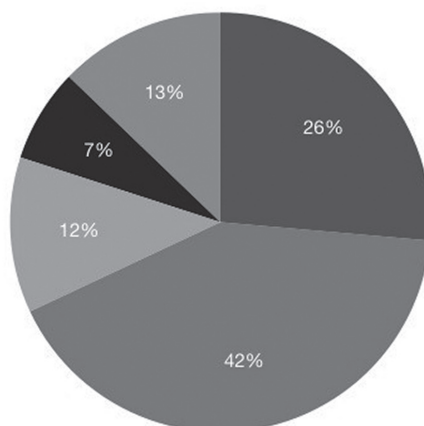
Source: Author's own study.

Expanding the data contained in the table, the chart below (Diagram 1) presents a breakdown of posts in which migrants were indicated as a source of risk, taking into account the types of threats<sup>4</sup>.

By far, the highest ratio was generated by the risks related to migrant crime (i.e., threats that can potentially affect everyone) and risks to the national and cultural identity of Germans, by indicating that such differences build an alternative society, and at the same time pose a threat to the values shared by the existing community. It can therefore be pointed out that 68% of the posts published by the AfD in 2020 referring to the dangers originating from migrants concerned threats that either refer to the lie within the sense of security understood as a basic human need, or cultural security, identified as belonging to a community with culturally and religiously shared values. Raised in the AfD's political

<sup>4</sup> The number of posts in 2020 was different in each month. There is no scientific explanation of the differences (no events or facts which can explain those differences). Over three months (i.e., January, October, and November), posts with similar information dedicated to the threats were published several times.

- Cultural and religious differences - 26%
- Migrant crime - 42%
- Failure to respect applicable law - 12%
- Threat to public finances through social assistance for migrants - 7%
- Illegal migration and obtaining asylum under false pretences- 13%



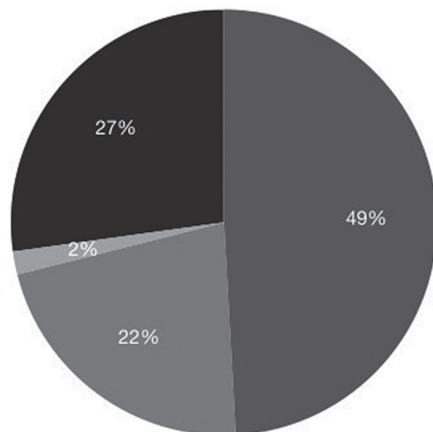
**Diagram 1.** Migrants as a Source of Threats

agenda as important: the defense of the German social system against obtaining asylum by migrants under false pretenses, and thus social benefits, is not such an important subject of communication in the virtual space. A much stronger argument in aggregating and activating virtual public opinion are risks identified directly with the functioning of an individual in the society, referring to the basic and somewhat antagonistic division of “us” – “them”. The social consequences of functioning of antagonized social groups concern, e.g., the fact that the actions of individuals belonging to the group opposite to their own are attributed to the entire group. As a result of virtual communication, the AfD party, by informing about individual criminal events (migrant crime – 42% of posts), promotes the thesis that migrants (or a large group of them) are people who break the law, and therefore pose a threat to the community. When referring to the second of the threats that appeared most often in the AfD’s posts on Facebook in 2020, i.e., cultural and religious differences of migrants (26%), it should be noted that this type of threat was considered significant for the functioning of the community, due to the potential possibility of imposing foreign cultural norms. Therefore, the mechanism of raising concerns among members of the community was used again, referring to threats that were indicated in the party’s program, but were

not assigned any significant importance. The AfD's political program focuses on the issue of the risk of terrorism, the source of which are various religious institutions, rather than on the actual threat to cultural values shared by the community.

To sum up, in this part of the analysis, the selection of the topics of the posts that dominated the AfD's virtual communication in 2020 did not correspond to the threats posed by migrants, which the party draws attention to in its political program. Risks in virtual messages formulated by the AfD serve to spread information arousing fear of the presence of migrants in society.

- Inefficiency of the German authorities in managing the problem of migrants - 49%
- Protection of German identity and national values - 22%
- Society's lack of acceptance for increasing migration - 2%
- Other - 27%



**Diagram 2.** Migrants as Subjects of Political Communication

Diagram 2, presenting the classification of other posts in which migrants became the subject of political discourse on topics other than the risks related to their inflow to German society, showed that the AfD party focused mainly on emphasizing the ineffectiveness of the German authorities in implementing the migration policy. Thus, the AfD, positioning itself as an opposition party, used migrants as an argument proving a flawed internal policy. The number of posts devoted to criticism of Angela Merkel's government and her directly (49%) dominated other topics. In the category of activities offered by the AfD as an opposition party, an important place was taken by the reference to the protection

of German identity and national values that the party (as if in response to the risks described earlier, threatening the security of individuals and communities) intends to protect. It can therefore be concluded that the categories concerning the topic of migrants in political communication are focused on revealing the role of the AfD as an opposition party. On the one hand, criticism of the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel, on the other, an indication of a possible change, if the AfD takes power. In virtual communication, the party had scarce interest in the dissemination of information related to the lack of acceptance of Germans for the growing migration (only 2% of posts related to this topic). The justification for the low level of such content in the AfD's virtual communication can be found in the previously quoted position of von Beyme (2019) that Germany is one of the countries in Europe with the best migration policy management. This means that many users of social media also see migration as not only a source of threat, but also opportunities for economic development. Thus, this topic (the Germans' disapproval of migration) was not an important subject of communication in the profile of the AfD party.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research allowed for the formulation of several conclusions. First, the choice of subject matter was dominated by a twofold message. The first message is that migrants are a source of threats. In this case, the content was built on posts revealing individual examples of migrants' crimes and pointing to the threats related to the presence of migrants in society for the preservation of German national and cultural identity. Communicating threats by the AfD party is part of a narrative whose goal is to create a policy of fear. According to the theses of Wodak, the "politics of fear" justifies normalizing the exclusion of migrants. The exclusion of migrants results from activities securing the community against potential threats. The second message is exposing the erroneous migration policy pursued by the government of Chancellor Merkel. This type of leading message refers to the actions of the AfD as an opposition party that uses migrants as a collective entity in order to formulate direct accusations against the implemented migration policy, and to indirectly criticize the government in general. In Germany in 2020, local elections were held, e.g., in North Rhine-Westphalia and the local parliament of Hamburg, where the AfD had its own candidates. Thus, political communication resulted from the fulfillment of current political needs,

positioning the AfD as an entity in the election campaign. On the other hand, the party's program assumptions regarding migrants did not constitute a significant indicator of the party's content on its Facebook profile. In its political program, the AfD emphasizes that it is not an Islamophobic or xenophobic party, but the analysis of the content of the posts shows that such attitudes are expressed in communication acts. Thus, in the process of communication, whether in the affective or political dimension, the AfD party positions itself as a populist entity, constructing a polarized message referring to two basic criteria, theoretically defined as a style of populist communication: reference to "state security" and to "collective feelings", creating a community. It should be emphasized that the AfD is positioning itself as a political group expressing the demands and will of the people, which stands in opposition to the migration policy pursued by the political and social elites (here, as an example, one should mention critical posts, not only referring to the actions of Chancellor Merkel and her government and subordinate administration, but also describing the activities of NGOs supporting migrants). The very concept of migrants has not been clearly defined in both the political and affective dimensions of the AfD's communication. Most often, this term was used to describe people coming to Germany from the Middle East and Africa (due to the migration crisis), but the term 'migrants' was also used to identify people from Central and Eastern Europe, i.e., from countries that belong to the EU (this applied to people from countries such as Poland, Slovakia, or Romania). Thus, the concept of migrants meant not only "culturally alien" entities (and their influx meaning a potential risk to cultural security), but also people who can participate in the distribution of resources, which, according to the AfD, threatens the financial stability of the state.

Analyzing the communication on the AfD party's Facebook profile, it was found that during the twelve months of 2020 no post was published that would present the migrant community in a positive light, both the newcomers and those who have lived in Germany for many years. Establishing a communication agenda in two leading trends – the perception of migrants as a threat and, in response, pointing to the AfD as a political alternative proposing a rational migration policy – makes migrants an important entity in political communication aimed at expanding the party's electorate. Social media allows the sender to directly reach network users with an unedited message and to promote the set content. The conducted research indicated two leading trends in virtual communications but did not confirm that the party's program corresponds to its communication activity in the field of migration policy and the migrants

themselves. Most of the posts are a response to current socio-political events, which help to build a narrative that causes fear and a sense of threat among users. Posts about migrants are clearly populist in nature. This conclusion confirms the growing importance of social media in building the visibility of populist parties on the Internet, which creates a message referring to satisfying the needs of the “nation” in virtual communication.

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