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Alternative für Deutschland: rhetoric against migrants as a threat to democracy in Germany

Right-wing populist – nationalist, conservative, and anti-immigrant – political parties and social movements across Europe are widely judged to be a challenge to liberal and democratic societies. This is particularly evident when looking at the debates on refugees and asylum seekers that have dominated public discourse in Europe towards the end of 2015 and throughout 2016. Although there seems to be consensus that right-wing populist parties are detrimental to social cohesion and solidarity within and across European societies, understanding their success and the increasing numbers of supporters remains a largely unresolved task for the social sciences (Salmela, von Scheve, 2017). Allessandro Sola suggests that the refugee crisis, and the related government's asylum policy, affected public opinion on immigration in Germany, by substantially increasing the share of people who are very concerned about immigration. Refugee flows might not only bring about large distributional consequences in the labour market (Borjas, Monras, 2017), but also affect people's anxieties (Sola, 2018). From a methodological standpoint, the closest paper to Solas article is Schüller (2012), who finds that the 9/11 attacks substantially increased concerns about immigration, and decreased concerns about hostility towards foreigners in Germany. Moreover, a recent paper by Hatton (2017) stresses the need to account for the salience of immigration, defined as the importance which is attached by individuals to immigration, relative to other policy issues. Series of studies have analysed the possible causes of the recent success of populism in the Western world, ranging from the economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and globalization shocks, to a decrease of trust in institutions and a cultural backlash (Dustmann, Eichengreen, Otten, Sapir, Tabellini, Zoega, 2017).

The field of this article is the far-right populist AfD party in the context of anti-immigrant rhetoric. I intend to establish to what extent the anti-immigrant agenda and activity can pose a threat to democracy in Germany. The field of research is the ideological background of the AfD. I intend to show what the anti-immigrant arguments stem from and what their boundaries are.

In conducting research, the author adopted the main hypothesis according to which: far-right and populist AfD displaying anti-immigrant rhetoric are increasingly going beyond the boundaries of free speech to extremisms that undermine the constitutional order in Germany.

The AfD aims to destabilise the democratic landscape by, among other things, building support for anti-immigrant attitudes. The AfD legitimises its attacks on "others" who they believe are a threat to society.

I chose to work on the period 2015–2022, a period starting from migration crisis. I close the period of analysis with 2022 – as a post-pandemic date and the opening of a new chapter of refugee movements in Europe caused by the war in Ukraine. I use political manifestos as primary sources for analysing the political discourse and actions towards immigrants. I aim to use a tool in the form of a model of hate-speech epidemics. To do so, I refer to the theoretical frameworks of the model proposed by Michał Bilewicz and Wiktor Soral. The model of hate-speech epidemics brings together theoretical insights from the social psychology of emotions (findings on contempt as an empathy-reducing sentiment), aggression (research on desensitization to verbal aggression), and political psychology (the role of norms and authority in shaping behavior). The main purpose of the model is to better explain The main purpose of the model is to better explain one of the most pressing social issues of the contemporary world – the influence of derogatory language on collective violence.

The pandemic has made movements with anti-immigrant rhetoric more likely to attempt political violence and influence Germany's constitutional basis. The author considers that the COVID-19 pandemic and previous migration crises have given "fast and cheap fuel" to AfD in Germany.

Literature review

Freedom of expression is fundamental to the maintenance of modern democracies because it facilitates the exchange of diverse opinions. In a participatory democracy, dialogue also facilitates the testing of contesting claims and the gaining of diverse input into political decision-making. Freedom of expression is also essential to the use of personal autonomy. Freedom of expression is regulated in modern fundamental laws. Freedom of expression is also incorporated in the European Convention on Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Freedom of expression, the free formation of opinion and respect for human rights are essential for everyone, in order to have the opportunity to express opinions, influence society and participate in the democratic discourse. Similarly, James Weinstein (2011) has written that "[i]f an individual is excluded from participating in public discourse because the government disagrees with the speaker's views or because it finds the ideas expressed too disturbing or offensive, any decision taken as a result of that discussion would, as to such an excluded citizen, lacklegitimacy." So if a person is forbidden from expressing a particular view about a proposed tax increase, whether the nation goes to war, immigration policy, or any matter of public concern, then to that extent and with respect to that citizen "the government is no democracy, but rather an illegitimate autocracy."

What is worth to notice, there are also margin of free speech in this democratic and globalized world. For example, Sakin Tanvir (2022) in his article "Hate Speech vs. Free Speech: The Ongoing Debate and Challenges in the Globalized World" has found that

there have been a narrow marginal factors between free speech and hate speech though many people are trying to abuse the notion of free speech by spreading hate speeches.

There is no single formal and universal definition of hate speech and the topic has been hotly debated by academics, legal experts, and policymakers alike. Although there is no one definition of hate speech, there have been several attempts to propose a working definition of such speech acts. According to the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, "hate speech includes all forms of speech that spread, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other hatreds based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed in aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, immigrants and people of immigrant origin." (*Recommendation No. R(97)20*, 1997, p. 107). For example, the monitoring body of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) – which has published individual country and cross-country recommendations about the phenomenon's complex nature-states that hate speech entails: the use of one or more particular forms of expression-namely, the advocacy, promotion or incitement of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat of such person or persons and any justification of all these forms of expression-that is based on a non-exhaustive list of characteristics or status that includes "race," color, language, religion or belief, nationality or national or ethnic origin, as well as descent, age, disability, sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation (*Recommendation Np. R(97)20*, 1997, p. 16).

Whether directly or indirectly, hate speech can encourage violent acts. This is because hate speech allows individuals and groups to express negative views toward others and coordinate efforts to act them out (Siegel, 2020). Many scholars link hate speech in political space to the escalation of violence and even genocides. Mark Thompson underlines that hateful rhetoric that targets rival ethnic groups – has been identified as a key precipitant of the onset and intensity of several notable civil wars and genocides. Anti-Croat and anti-Bosnian Muslim rhetoric by Serb politicians in the late 1980s and early 1990 s is frequently argued to have been a motivating factor for civil conflict and mass killings by government troops and irregular forces in Former Yugoslavia (Thompson, 1999). Dehumanizing depictions of black Africans in Darfur by Sudanese politicians have been correlated with more intense manifestations of civil war violence in Sudan in the mid-2000 s (Hagan, Rymond-Richmond, 2008). Luoch (2016) argues that hate speech and inflammatory language against rival political-ethnic groups have been an important contributor to political violence in the context of elections during the last 20 years in Kenya. He concludes that even though language fuels conflict, efforts to end conflict must go beyond language and elections (surface manifestations of deep-seated grievances) to economic marginalization which is at the core of differences that spasmodically erupt in violence (Luoch, 2016). Perhaps the most infamous case of hate speech by political figures fueling mass violence can be found in the Rwandan Civil War in the early to mid-1990s. Multiple scholars allege that antiTutsi radio broadcasts by Hutu extremist political figures played a key role in motivating and mobilizing political violence and genocide (Thompson, 1999).

Another interensting study (Piazza, 2020) empirically examine the relationship between the use of hateful rhetoric by political figures and domestic terrorism. James

Piazza in his article "Politician hate speech and domestic terrorism" proves that since 2000, politician hate speech, mostly targeting ethnic, racial, social, or religious minorities but sometimes targeting members of rival political groups, has been a feature of domestic terrorism-afflicted countries such as Iraq, Nepal, Somalia, Bangladesh, Turkey, Colombia, Israel, Egypt, Ukraine, Russia, the Philippines, Italy, Greece, Lebanon and Sri Lanka (Piazza, 2020). In the United Kingdom, it is a criminal offense to incite racial or religious hatred, and variations on this legislation – while unconstitutional in the United States – exist in the majority of developed democracies, including Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, India, South Africa, Sweden, and New Zealand (Howard, 2019), and in authoritarian contexts, particularly in the Arab World where laws banning online hate speech are often lumped together with laws countering extremism (Althoff, 2018). Yet despite the existence of laws explicitly banning hate speech, how these laws should be enforced in practice, particularly in the digital age, is a subject of ongoing debate (Siegel, 2020). Jeffrey Howard in his paper "Free Speech and Hate Speech" asks a question: does a proper commitment to freedom of expression demand the legal protection of so-called hate speech? He claims that the world's democracies fiercely disagree on the answer to this question. Consider the United Kingdom, where it is a criminal offense to incite racial or religious hatred (Brown, 2016). Heinze (2016) in his book, "Hate Speech and Democratic Citizenship" argument takes the form of a hypothetical imperative: If we wish to live in a democracy (as all of us purport to want), then we must endorse viewpoint neutrality and thus refuse to ban hate speech, lest we no longer live in a democracy. As howard argues bans on hate speech do not restrict people from having hateful thoughts; they simply prevent people from harming others through the expression of those thoughts. As he mentioned, committed democrats need not think that citizens enjoy the authority to enact seriously unjust legislation of the sort that hate speech advocates. Brettschneider (2007) himself favors a system of strong judicial review, which ties the hands of democratic legislatures by preventing them from enacting legislation that undermines citizens' basic rights. Such a restriction, on Brettschneider's view, is not undemocratic, for it serves the very values that underwrite democracy. So if citizens may be permissibly prevented by a constitutional court from enacting legislation that violates fundamental rights, why do they nevertheless have the prerogative to advocate the adoption of such hateful legislation in their public discourse?

Hate speech is extremely harmful both to the individuals at whom it is targeted and to society It is detrimental to equality or equal treatment, as well as to the principle of non-discrimination, which are the cornerstones of any democratic society. Hate speech has a negative impact on social order and peace, as well as on the quality of life of communities; it has the potential to severely damage the social fabric and separate communities. Finally, hate speech has the potential to develop into hate crimes, which in some circumstances turn can lead to genocide. It can lead to genocide especially in regimes that have strong authoritarian tendencies.

Many people who abuse freedom of speech and expression list their offensive attitudes as a right to express to express their opinions, but these can lead to harmful circumstances that can lead to instability in society. Thus, a multidimensional approach to the distinction between freedom of expression and hate speech should be implement-

ed. Laws should be constructed so that people are aware of and understand the fine line between freedom of expression and hate speech.

AfD – the ideological agenda

Alternative for Germany is a relatively young political party, formally established on 14 April 2013, when the first, founding convention was held in Berlin on the initiative of Bernd Lucke. The initiators of the new formation were mainly economics professors, entrepreneurs and journalists disappointed with the CDU/CSU's currency union policy to date. The name of the new initiative was not chosen at random, as it "[referred] to Chancellor Angela Merkel's opinion that there is no alternative to the eurozone" (Bielka, 2014, p. 107). According to the activists forming Alternative for Germany at the time, such a possibility did exist, and the demand to leave the eurozone was the core of the programme and the main reason for the formation of a new formation on the German political scene. Moreover, the "founding fathers" made no secret of the fact that their political ambition was above all to influence the CDU to return to its roots (Goerres, Spies, Kumlin, 2017). The main advocate of this political agenda was a newcomer to German politics: Bernd Lucke, a professor of economics with a pronounced market-liberal stance and very present in German media during the months of the financial crisis in and before 2013. Together with some former second-rank CDU members, including national-conservative politician and newspaper publisher Alexander Gauland, Lucke founded the AFD in February 2013. Nearly exclusively focusing on an agenda of soft Euroscepticism1, the party was not only able to win 4.7 percent of votes in the Bundestag election of 2013, but also a 7.4 percent in the election to the European Parliament in 2014. By then, also Hans-Olaf Henkel, former chairmen of the German employer organization BDI, had joined the AFD, another prominent advocate of a more market-liberal German political economy (Goerres, Spies, Kumplin, 2017, p. 5). Without a doubt, Björn Höcke was the most controversial and one of the most influential figures in the AfD (Klikauer, 2019). In Sebastian Hennig's book "Never twice in the same river", an interview with Björn Höcke is presented. Höcke is portrayed as a "right-wing extremist, a völkisch-nationalistic bio-racist and apocalyptic AfD leader". Key to understand Höcke is his ideology-shaping heritage of East Prussia where Höcke's forbearers originated. This shapes his reactionary longing for a "lost homeland". A second ideology-shaping element is the idea that "battles create identities". Höcke says, "to be Prussian is a lifestyle". This means Prussian authoritarian militarism. It does not mean democracy. Höcke's illusionary lifestyle of Prussian militarism ended when the Red Army "invaded" Höcke's homeland. Höcke doesn't use the term liberated. He believes the liberation from Nazism (not Nazism itself) was "a terrible catastrophe". In Höcke's selective mind-set, it all started with the forced removal of Germans from Eastern Europe. That Nazi-Germany invaded Poland starting World War II, that Nazism killed millions of Jews and many others, that it created the Holocaust and Auschwitz, simply does not feature in Höcke's perception. Instead, Björn Höcke fancies the military and the battle. Höcke thinks that migrants will cause the "brutal removal of the Germans" resulting in an "Islamisation

of Germany". Against that, he wants to rejuvenate his hallucination of a "unified will of the German Volk". This negates pluralism and democracy while again conjuring up images of a Volksgemeinschaft. According to Höcke, only this can re-establish the "framework of order for the German Volk". This new order will allow Germany to "fight against globalisation" (Klikaurer, 2019). *Nativism*, which describes a form of xenophobic nationalism (Betz, 2017, pp. 335–353) that "subsumes racism, ethnocentrism, and anti-immigrant sentiment" (Arzheimer, 2015, p. 537), has become a core feature of the AfD. Everything that the party counts as non-native is seen as a threat to the nation state and its homogeneity, claiming that the cultural identity of immigrants, especially of those from Muslim countries, is incompatible with Western values. Policies like closing borders and restricting migration are therefore supported. With this policy profile, the party exploited the fact that immigration dominated the political discourse in Germany for quite some time. The coronavirus crisis, however, shifted attention from immigration towards health and economic policies (Lehmann, Zehnter, 2022, p. 3).

Thus, representatives of the AFD advocate anti-European, anti-immigration and anti-refugee policies and speak out on other previously taboo topics in German politics (Serranos, Papakyriakopoulos, Hegelich, Shahrezaye, 2020, p. 214). The party has recently achieved revolutionary for a durable and stable German party system electoral results in the individual federal states. In March 2016. 15.1% in Baden-Württemberg, 12.6% in Rhineland-Palatinate (the third result in both) and a record 24.3% in Saxony-Anhalt. September 2016 also saw the vote of Maclemburg-Vorpommern, where the AfD scored second, ahead of the CDU (20.8 per cent), and Berlin, where the AfD, despite only scoring fifth, surprised observers of political life and the people of Berlin themselves with this result (14.2 per cent). However, nothing caused such a violent media storm as the result of 12.6% of the vote in the 2017 Bundestag elections and the fact that the party won 92 seats in the German parliament making the AfD the third force in the Bundestag (Bundestag Election, 2021). Moreover, in March 2020, Germany's domestic intelligence agency labeled the AfD faction known as Flügel ("wing") as a threat to the country's democratic order. The agency, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV), also announced that it would place Flügel under systematic surveillance, allowing the BfV to recruit informants, keep personal data on file, and monitor phone calls. The head of AfD in the German state of Thuringia, Björn Höcke, led the extremist wing. German media reported that 30 to 40% of AfD members may belong to this most radical faction (Kałabunowska, 2021, p. 280). According to a BfV official, the increased scrutiny came as the faction was believed to be uniting far-right extremist groups, including neo-Nazis, and coordinating online. On March 20, 2020, AfD's executive committee voted to dissolve Flügel by April 30, 2020, fearing the faction could bring increased scrutiny to the entire party (Counter Extremism Project). Since spring 2021, the entire party has officially remained under counterintelligence surveillance as a potential threat to the constitutional order. In January 2022, Jörg Meuthen, who represents the moderate sector of the party, resigned from his AfD membership and position as co-chairman in protest against the rise of extreme tendencies in the party (Jasiński, 2022).

Political manifestos and the enemies

The research tool of this article is a content analysis of the AfD's political manifestos. Since the beginning of last century, election manifestos have been considered vital communication and policy-positioning documents that political parties in representative democracies develop and utilise in order to appeal to the electorate, and potentially win their vote (Eder et al., 2017). Political parties use them to explain the policies which they strive to enact when elected in parliaments and governments (Budge, 2001). These fit-for-purpose campaign documents routinely represent the collective internal consensus of political parties' policy preferences (Ceron, 2012, p. 681) and commonly respond to issue salience in the society to gain more votes (Braun, Schmitt, 2020, pp. 640–650). Election manifestoes are also well-suited as an analytical basis because they are compromise texts that reflect the results of a number of discussions, votes and revisions. Although they are formulated in one voice, they are outcomes of discursive fights that contain traces of diverse voices. As results of internal debates and as legitimisation bases for subsequent election campaigns, election manifestoes are particularly suitable for isolating the main discursive elements of the language of a party's election campaign – they can be seen as discursive nodal points (Kranert, 2019). Election manifestos are a central feature of electoral campaigns (Muhhamad, 2020, p. 3).

At its party congress in March 2014, AfD adopted a European election manifesto that takes up the central elements of its general »election programme« and explains them in more detail (*Programm der Alternative für Deutschland*, 2014) Since its beginning, the movement's profile has been closely oriented to the European Union and the euro area. Its "founding myth" is based on the government's euro-bailout policy. The AfD is thus a euro-sceptical party sui generis (Lewandowsky, 2014). The AfD's 2014 European Parliament election manifesto is especially instructive in terms of comprehending the party's positions. According to the AfD's preamble, it seeks a sovereign state-based EU committed to human rights, democracy, Christian Western values, selective integration, subsidiarity, competition, and the rule of law. The AfD's reference to Christian tradition as a necessary component of German culture is the most direct link between right-wing populism and conservative Christianity (Althoff, 2018, p. 24). Besides the harsh criticism of the EU and the euro the AfD has positions on the rule of law and democracy, financial policy and taxes, education, energy policy and integration policy. As far as the manifesto's ideas on immigration are concerned, we can find them in the sections: "education" and "integration". Education: In its education policy the Alternative für Deutschland calls for "national standards oriented towards Germany's best school systems", although it sees families as primarily responsible for education (*Election programme*, 2013, p. 1). In social media it also demands protection for "traditional education" against "multi-culti indoctrination". In integration policy the AfD's position is well within the conservative spectrum. It calls for »immigration law reform« aimed at decisively preventing »unregulated immigration into our social security systems« (*Election programme*, 2013; Lewandovsky, 2014).

Thus, until 2015, the AfD was mainly classified as a "soft" Eurosceptic party. Since 2015, the AfD's narrative has gradually evolved into a breeding ground for a more

populist and critical view of Germany's political settlement as a whole (Lees, 2018, p. 305). The language of the "Manifesto for Germany" in 2017 was already more elaborate and pointed to an internal threat to Germany's culture. The words "immigration" and "immigrants" appear 88 times in the manifesto. "Islam" – 37 times, "Muslims" – 13 times. The document therefore indicates which direction the AfD party's rhetoric will move in. Reference was made to Western culture – as one can read in the AfD's political manifesto, in the age of multiculturalism and globalism, culture is a special area of interest and activity for the state. The party says that the preservation of the European heritage based on the pillars of the Christian tradition, the scientific legacy and Roman law, as well as the cultivation of the cultural identity and distinctiveness of of Germany itself (*The political manifesto*, 2017). The Alternative's programme therefore contains many directly anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic. The programme even explicitly points out that "Islam does not belong to Germany": "Islam does not belong to Germany. Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are viewed by the AfD as a danger to our state, our society, and our values. An Islam which neither respects nor refrains from being in conflict with our legal system, or that even lays claim to power as the only true religion, is incompatible with our legal system and our culture. Many Muslims live as law-abiding and well-integrated citizens amongst us, and are accepted and valued members of our society. However, the AfD demands that an end is put to the formation and increased segregation by parallel Islamic societies relying on courts with shari'a laws. The AfD wishes to curb a trend towards religious radicalisation amongst Muslims, and these turning into violent Salafists or terrorists" (*The political manifesto*, 2017).

Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are seen by the The group is opposed to immigration to Germany, particularly for the purpose of benefiting from the German welfare system. The AfD also calls for a a ban on foreign funding for mosques, full face coverings for women, the wearing of headscarves by female civil servants, teachers and schoolgirls, the construction of minarets, muezzin calls and ritual slaughter. In addition, it advocates naturalisation and controlled immigration from third countries, the maintenance of culture and identity by promoting and declaring German as the state language in the constitution. The AfD also calls for more restrictive naturalisation laws for the children of immigrants in the next generation: "German citizenship should only be granted to immigrants who have come of age. This will rule out the automatic granting of German citizenship to children of foreign parents, as this has been a source of considerable abuse. Such children should only receive German citizenship where at least one parent is already a German citizen. For this reason we want to scrap citizenship by birth from the statute book" (*The political manifesto*, 2017).

The AfD recognizes the freedom of belief, conscience and confession anchored in Article 140 of the German Constitution. However, they assume that Islamic organizations in Germany do not meet the legal requirements of the free state church law and should therefore not be granted the status of a corporation under public law. In cases where religious traditions and commandments come into conflict with state law, the practice of religion should be restricted. In this context, criticism of Islam and religious satire are also permitted; it should not be defamed as "Islamophobia" and "racism" (Broeke, Kunter, 2021).

The AfD focuses primarily on Islam as a culturally strange value system and tradition and as representing a politically dangerous power. Christianity, Judaism or other religions are not considered as religious factors; likewise, reference is only made once to the "Occident" as a cultural horizon. In its program for the European elections to the 9th European Parliament, currently the most recent election program, the AfD largely follows the lines of the federal election program of 2017. However, it is interesting that the AfD for the first time here refers to the danger of Islam to anti-Semitism, which must be consistently fought in word and deed. In addition to Islam, reference is only made once to Christianity and the churches are explicitly named; in the context of development aid, they should provide humanitarian aid (*Europawahlprogramm*, 2019; Broeke, Kunter, 2021).

The 2017 manifesto makes it abundantly clear that the party's positions contradict several core democratic values, including tolerance and protecting minorities and their rights. In the 2021 elections, the AFD called in its manifestos for a "normal" Germany. The members voted on the party's manifesto ahead of national elections scheduled for September where its chosen campaign slogan was: "Germany. But normal." That "normality" for the party meant things such as a return to compulsory military service and "banning minarets". In a separate vote, the attendees endorsed Germany's leaving the European Union as part of their manifesto. Germany's exit was "necessary," according to the initiative, but members also called for creating a "new European community of economies and interests". The group's members also included in the manifesto demands to limit immigration by increasing controls and creating "physical barriers" in the form of a border wall. They disagree with "any reunification of refugee families," and call for a strong restriction of the right to asylum. (Deutsche Welle, 2021; *Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag*). In this manifestos the party was fully betting on Trump's strategy: simplify, polarize, attack.

To sum up, the AfD's positions on critical nationalist ideology issues such as immigration, European integration, and authoritarianism have become increasingly radicalized (Lipa, 2022, p. 101). However, it is worth noting that the AfD is asserting itself in its idology. AfD defend themselves in their manifestoes against a characterisation as far-right parties based on accusations of islamophobia and racism. By systematically appealing to articles of the Basic Law, the AfD attempts to demonstrate that it is firmly grounded in the German constitution.

Conclusions

A "politics of fear" (Wodak, 2016) clearly dominates the AfD manifestos. Party is using anti – Islam sentiments and a fear of migration as a central core of its programme. The German culture and Christianity is, for the AfD, under threat by Muslim immigrants and refugees and needs to be protected. As distinct from other parties, such as the CDU and the CSU (who have the term "Christian" in their party names), there is no reference by the AfD to what "Christian tradition" means. The anti-immigration stance of the AfD, however, makes clear what it does not consider

part of the Christian tradition: empathy for refugees. Furthermore, within the AfD, racial connotations are often mixed with the goal of protecting German culture and tradition. Comparing multiculturalism with ethno-suicide, or commentaries such as "The German people are a design of God" (Bednarz, 2018, p. 23), are examples of the overlap that exists between right-wing populism, German nationalism, and Christian themes (Althof, 2018).

Thus, we can find elements of the hate speech epidemic in the manifestos (Bilewicz, Soral 2020). Regarding the social psychology of emotions, it was found that the AfD clearly expresses feelings of contempt towards Islam and immigrants. This gives room for a reduction of empathy. Verbal aggression is not explicitly expressed in the manifestos. However, as further research and analysis by a number of researchers shows – it is a prelude to verbal aggression primarily online. For example, Angelika Strube (2015a) and Liane Bednarz (2018) carefully scrutinized Christian websites. Both found numerous references to AfD, Pegida, the Identitarian movement and other ethno-racist platforms. Frequent subjects were islamophobia, persecution of Christians, family, abortion, and the so-called "gender-delusion". Angelika Strube, a theologian, speaks of "Christian Media as a bridge to the Right" Christian websites, networks, and magazines which post links and texts of Pegida, the Identitarian movement, AfD members and politicians, or which invite speakers from these groups.

Howewer, s distinction, should be made between manifestos, and the language used in public debates, traditional news organizations, and social media. For example, the AfD's immigration policy has always been hard-line on social media platforms and election posters, and Frauke Petry, the AfD's leading spokesperson in 2015, was a vocal opponent of Merkel's immigration plan, and her populist stance, which included the concept of border checks, proved popular with voters (Lees, 2018, pp. 305–306). This suggests that the AfD's rhetoric serves a short-term populist tactical agenda and that the party's founders used a native electoral political strategy, while Lucke encouraged party members to use populist appeal to garner media attention (Franzmann, 2018, p. 8).

As for the element of political psychology, we can also find elements of it in the manifestos. The AfD very often refers to the Constitution and the law in justifying its demands. They have a preventive function in the event of allegations of radicalisation. Taking all the analysed elements into account, we can consider the AfD manifestos as a core – a kind of prelude that opens the way for the spread of the *hate speech epidemic*.

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Summary

The field of this artice is the far-right populist AfD party in the context of anti-immigrant rhetoric. I intend to establish to what extent the anti-immigrant agenda and activity can pose a threat to democracy in Germany. The field of research is the ideological background of the AfD. I intend to show what the anti-immigrant arguments stem from and what their boundaries are. In conducting research I adopted the main hypothesis according to which: far-right and populist AfD displaying anti-immigrant rhetoric are increasingly going beyond the boundaries of free speech to extremisms that undermine the constitutional order in Germany. The AfD aims to destabilise the democratic landscape by, among other things, building support for anti-immigrant attitudes.

Key words: Alternative für Deutschland, AfD, hate speech, immigrants, democracy

Alternatywa dla Niemiec: retoryka przeciwko migrantom jako zagrożenie dla demokracji w Niemczech

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem niniejszego artykułu jest skrajnie prawicowa populistyczna partia AfD w kontekście antyimigranckiej retoryki. Celem jest ustalenie w jakim stopniu antyimigrancki program i działalności mogą stanowić zagrożenie dla demokracji w Niemczech. Obszarem badań jest ideologiczne tło AfD. Zamierzam pokazać, z czego wynikają argumenty antyimigranckie oraz jakie są ich granice. Prowadząc badania przyjęłam główną hipotezę, zgodnie z którą: skrajnie prawicowa i populistyczna AfD prezentująca antyimigrancką retorykę coraz częściej wykracza poza granice wolności słowa w kierunku ekstremizmów podważających porządek konstytucyjny w Niemczech. AfD dąży do destabilizacji demokratycznego krajobrazu, między innymi poprzez budowanie poparcia dla postaw antyimigranckich.

Słowa kluczowe: Alternatywa dla Niemiec, AfD, mowa nienawiści, imigranci, demokracja