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POPULISM AND COVID-19: THE INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON  
POPULISM OF AFD AND PERCEPTIONAL CHANGE OF AFD  
SUPPORTERS TOWARDS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ELITES

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POPÜLİZM VE COVID-19: COVID-19'UN AFD'NİN POPÜLİZMİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ  
VE AFD DESTEKÇİLERİNİN ULUSAL VE ULUSLARARASI ELİTLERE BAKIŞ AÇISINDAKİ DEĞİŞİM

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- 4) Crisis
- 5) Elite

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- 1) Popülizm
- 2) Almanya için Alternatif Partisi
- 3) COVID-19
- 4) Kriz
- 5) Elit

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| AfD      | Alternative for Germany                                      |
| BfV      | The Domestic Intelligence Service of the Germany             |
| CDU      | Christian Democratic Union of Germany                        |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease 2019                                     |
| CSU      | Christian Social Union in Bavaria                            |
| DBR      | Federal Republic of Germany                                  |
| EC       | European Commission  |
| ECJ      | European Court of Justice                                    |
| ECR      | European Conservatives and Reformists                        |
| EU       | European Union   |
| FDP      | Free Democratic Party  |
| FIDESZ   | Hungarian Civic Alliance                                     |
| FPÖ      | Freedom Party of Austria                                     |
| PEGIDA   | Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident |
| PiS      | Law and Justice Party  |
| S&D      | The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats         |
| SPD      | Social Democratic Party of Germany                           |
| US       | United States  |
| WHO      | World Health Organization                                    |
| WTO      | World Trade Organization                                     |

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## ABSTRACT

Populist parties including Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) frame the national and international elites as a scapegoat during all crises. By bringing the crises into certain 'fear' forms, populist parties raise the level of anxiety in the society and defend themselves as a 'sole remedy'. Another feature of populist parties is having a simple, clear-cut explanation for all problems, which combine current crises with other problems of society. For example, while linking the migrant crisis to an increase in the unemployment rate; they match multiculturalism with the destruction of society's values. The COVID-19 crisis has turned into a pandemic in a very short time and had an atomic impact on world politics. Populist parties have been trying to consolidate or increase their political power by conceptualising COVID-19 with fear and threat discourses in populism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the AfD's strategy has resembled the logic of a 'business model'. The party has packaged shock and confusion in populist discourse and presented it to society again. In other words, they meet the 'need for explanatory demand' in the society with the supply which they set up using their own discourses. They then present them to the society especially through the channel of social media tools. For the seek of the main argument of this thesis, AfD's political performance during the coronavirus crisis has been analysed. Therefore, it is important to deeply analyse the AfD's official statements, leader's social media posts and tweets from the first day that COVID-19 appeared in Germany to the second week of May. The main purpose of this thesis is to analyse how the COVID-19 global crisis has been instrumentalized in the populist rhetoric by the AfD, as well as discuss perception shifts among AfD followers towards national and international elites.

**Keywords:** Populism, AfD, COVID-19, Crisis

## ÖZET

Almanya için Alternatif (Almanca: Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) gibi popülist partiler her kriz dönemlerinde, hükümetlerin yanı sıra ulusal ve uluslararası elitleri ‘günah keçileri’ olarak ilan etmektedir. Krizleri belli ‘korku’ formlarına getirerek toplumdaki endişe seviyesini yukarıya taşıyıp kendilerinin ‘tek çare’ olarak savunmaktadırlar. Popülist partilerin bir diğer özelliği, krizlerin ve problemlerin açıklanmasında çok net ve sade açıklamalar getirmelerinin yanı sıra bu krizleri toplumun diğer problemleri ile birleştirmektedirler. Örneğin, göçmen krizini işsizlik oranının artışına bağlarken; çok kültürlülüğü toplum değerlerinin yıkılması ile eşleştirmektedirler.

Popülist partiler, 2019’nin sonunda patlak veren ve çok hızlı bir şekilde küresel salgına dönüşen COVID-19 hastalığını, popülist literatürdeki korku ve kriz söylemleri ile harmanlayarak kendi güçlerini arttırmaya çalışmışlardır. AfD, bu süreçte bir ‘ekonomi modelini’ andıran mantıkla, toplumdaki şok ve karasızlığı popülist bir söylemle paketleyip topluma tekrar sunmuştur. Yani toplumdaki ‘açıklayıcı talep ihtiyacını’, kendi söylemleri ile kurdukları arz ile paketleyip, topluma özellikle sosyal medya araçları üzerinden sunduğu gözlemlenmiştir.

Bu sebeplerden dolayı tezin en önem verdiği kısımların başında korona krizi sürecinde AfD’nin bu süreci nasıl değerlendirdiği incelenmiştir. Bunu yaparken, AfD’nin resmi kaynakları, liderlerinin konuşmaları ve sosyal medya paylaşımları korona krizi sürecinin ilk gününden başlayın Mayıs ayının ikinci haftasına kadar derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Bu tezin en önemli amacı, AfD’ye destek veren kişilerin COVID-19 sürecinde hükümet ve uluslararası elitlere (Avrupa Birliği) karşı düşüncelerinde bir değişiklik olup olmadığını ölçmektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Popülizm, AfD, COVID-19, Kriz

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The performance of populism and populist parties during national and global crisis periods has always attracted the attention of social science studies. This thesis is shedding light on the current COVID-19 global crisis and populist party performances. The COVID-19 crisis has had an atomic impact on world politics. It has gone far beyond the health crisis. World trade and production have been significantly damaged by the pandemic and there has been a curiosity of how governments and particularly populist parties would perceive the coronavirus crisis. Therefore, this thesis aims to conduct a very detailed discourse and content analysis of populism, populist parties, (particularly the AfD during the COVID-19 crisis) in order to have a proper explanation on how COVID-19 has been instrumentalized in the political sphere in order to scapegoat national and European elites.

Indeed, populism is a phenomenon which simplifies all challenges and crises by accusing ‘elites’ and ‘old-establishments’ of being the cause. Wodak (2015), suggests that “discursive strategies of ‘victim–perpetrator reversal’, ‘scapegoating’ and the construction of conspiracy theories therefore belong to the necessary toolkit of right-wing populist rhetoric” (Wodak, 2015:4). Indeed, separating society into two groups is the core strategy of the populist parties, including framing elites, minorities and foreigners as the reason for all problems. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, populist ideology has absorbed the crisis to reproduce its own rhetoric. Populist parties argue that ‘corrupt elites’ do not consider the ‘will of the real people’, and they are mainly responsible for such a crisis due to the border regimes and migration policies. Therefore, anti-elitist and eurosceptic rhetoric has boomed again during the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe.

This comparative analysis on the AfD sheds light on the populist anatomy of the party. Although the AfD appeared in 2013 as an anti-euro party, the AfD has shown different populist symptoms at different times and crises. The AfD party program has widened and built up over time to include other political issues including those related to identity, culture, immigration, and Islam in which party and representatives' language has increasingly been seen as populist in tone.

This thesis argues that populist logic instrumentalized dichotomization of society or dichotomized societies. Also, populist ideology intensifies and cements the idea of pure and not-disoriented people. The AfD has several indicators that link to populist ideology. Furthermore, the AfD perfectly segregates itself from those politicians who are named 'the elites'. This thesis has analysed the notion of discursive populist samples, which goes beyond the idea of dichotomization of 'the people' and 'the corrupt elites.' It includes anti-establishment ideas which put a moral distance between 'pragmatic oriented elites' and 'abended people'. For example, the AfD's 2017 manifesto includes examples, such as the party claims that the European community has developed into an undemocratic construct, which is occupied by the political actors of Europe and is shaped by non-transparent, uncontrolled bureaucracies. They argue that the principles of subsidiarity and the prohibition of state liability for the debts of other countries set out in the European treaties are ignored (AfD, 2017).

In the last quarter of 2019, a new global crisis, COVID-19 appeared. All populist parties including AfD have conceptualized the pandemic as an instrument to dichotomize 'the people' and 'the elites', including 'old establishments such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or European Union (EU). This included blaming and scapegoating national and/or international elites for all woes. Even some populist parties and leaders associate the COVID-19 pandemic with 'specific others'. For example, US president Donald Trump calls the coronavirus the "Chinese virus" and the "Wuhan virus". Likewise, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban blamed foreigners and migrants for bringing the pandemic into Hungary.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the AfD's strategy has resembled the logic of a 'business model'. The party has packaged shock and confusion in populist discourse and presented it to society again. In other words, they meet the 'need for explanatory demand' in the society with the supply which they set up using their own discourses. They then present them to the society especially through the channel of social media tools. Therefore, in order to test the core statements of this thesis, it is important to deeply analyse the AfD's official statements, leader's social media posts and tweets from the first day that COVID-19 appeared in Germany to the second week of May.

Social media is the main weapon that the AfD uses to achieve its political agenda and general purpose. Although the AfD has been on top in terms of social media popularity among political parties in Germany, the AfD's well-oiled social media machine apparently has stuttered during the COVID-19 crisis. The AfD has been challenged with some internal and external crisis at the same time as the pandemic. Therefore, for the first time, the AfD has struggled to formulate a coherent stance on such a crisis. Although there is a perceptual shift among AfD supporters towards the federal government during the COVID-19 crisis, this thesis tests to see if there is also a perception shift among AfD supporters towards national and European elites during the COVID-19 crisis by using a comparative analysis method.

The structure of this thesis contains eight chapters. In the first chapter, the introduction, research question and research framework will be explained. The second chapter explains the methodology, such as which research methods were used and an explanation of case selection and data collection. In the third chapter, this thesis reviews the literature on populism and provides a general outlook with in-depth information about the phenomenon. The fourth chapter gives information about the populist anatomy of the AfD. In the fifth chapter, the COVID-19 crisis is analyzed in populist rhetoric. In the sixth chapter, political performance of the AfD

will be tested. The seventh chapter provides a comparative analysis of in-depth interviews. Finally, in the last chapter or conclusion, all findings are summarized.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The core objective of this chapter is to define and discuss the research method and methodology which have been applied for the thesis. The main purpose of this thesis is to analyse how the COVID-19 global crisis has been instrumentalized in the populist rhetoric by the AfD, as well as discuss perception shifts among AfD followers towards national and international elites. Since the last quarter of 2019, the COVID-19 crisis has spilled all around the world and dramatically changed world politics. Particularly, populist parties have aimed to use the pandemic for their own political purposes. Although this thesis presents many examples of how populist leaders and parties utilize the pandemic in order to extend their power, this study focuses more on Germany and the AfD. In order to do that, this thesis focuses on how COVID-19 has been conceptualized in populist language. Therefore, this thesis starts with conducting an analysis of a variety of populist literature, and an examination of the standing point of the AfD. Later on, the AfD's populist symptoms are tested in descriptive analysis. Afterwards, the thesis conducts in-depth interviews with AfD supporters in order to provide individual perspectives from an insider's view.

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce&Neale, 2006).

## **2.2. RESEARCH METHOD AND CASE SELECTION**

Qualitative and quantitative methods are two common ways in which data can be collected. The primary data for this study was collected using qualitative research techniques by conducting in-depth interviews with 12 AfD supporters who are settled in the Berlin and Brandenburg states, in order to dig out individual perspectives of the pandemic. In-depth interviews were conducted online via Zoom and Facebook video calls in May, 2020. One of the most important advantages of the online one on one in-depth interviews was that the environment for the interviewee was where he/she feels more comfortable and freer; and there is less pressure and concern about the questions and communication. Particularly, having such an interview environment is a key factor to collecting more accurate answers from ‘sensitive groups’. Although the AfD supporters may not be seen as a ‘sensitive group’, they are still very unlikely to meet face to face with AfD supporters as a ‘foreign student’. Therefore, all interviews were conducted online and anonymously. Furthermore, interviews have been conducted in English or German. As a non fluent German speaker, I preferred an interviewee who could speak in English and was willing to speak. Therefore, five in-depth interviews have been done in English, and seven of twelve have been conducted in German. Due to my German level, I kindly asked my German-Turkish flat mate, Baris Yergezen to be an interviewer on my behalf, in order to not have any misunderstanding or miscommunication between interviewees and interviewer.

In this thesis, an analysis of AfD supporters provides an implicit overview of to what extent party rhetoric on the COVID-19 crisis is internalized by its followers. Although a qualitative research method perfectly fits this thesis, a quantitative research method also has been conducted in order to generalize some common features of interviewees and their comments on the questions.

Furthermore, a qualitative method analysis was conducted of literature, official statements, manifestos, reports, speeches, and articles. For secondary data, websites

and newspapers have been critically analysed in order to define and compare AfD's standing point in approaches to populist literature.

The main reasons behind the case selection is respectively; the importance of Germany in world politics, AfD's rising populist power in Germany and Europe, AfD's ability to take advantage of all crises and Germany's performance on the COVID-19 crisis management, including the perception of euroscepticism and performance of the European Union during a crisis making this case selection more attractive than other cases.

*The Cinderella complex of populism, whereby we seek a perfect fit for the 'slipper' of populism, searching among the feet that nearly fit but always in search of the one true limb that will provide us with pure case of populism.*

*Isaiah Berlin, 1967*

## **CHAPTER III**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW ON POPULISM**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Populism is one of the most popular terms nowadays in the political world. In almost everywhere in the world, populist parties are on the rise. However, it's not a new concept. In fact, its roots go back to the 19th century. Nevertheless, there are many deficiencies in the literature and more research needs to be done. For instance, there is still no proper or single definition, yet there are several different approaches towards the term.

The purpose of this chapter is to put forward a literature review on populism in order to assure a standing point of AfD on its spectrum. In terms of decreeing whether the AfD has populist symptoms, -and if yes, in which approach- there is need for clarification and analysis of populism in order to construct the anatomy of the AfD. Particularly, in the last two decades, populism has been the centre of social science. But as Ivan Krastev asks, 'do we live in the age of populism? Or not yet or is it exaggerated?' This chapter starts with an examination of what populism is and how academics approach the term. The chapter begins with the definition and contention of populism as well as their differentials and assumptions. Then, it examines a variety of different styles and approaches to analysing populism. Next, it focuses on the AfD as a specific case study, to portray and characterize where the AfD stands related to these approaches.

### 3.2. POPULISM

Francisco Panizza (2005), initiates the “cliché of popularity of populism” (Panizza, 2005:1). Populism is a concept that is widely used but is far from having a single-shared definition. It can be said that authors, scientists and scholars from different fields have not yet reached concurrence. Paul Taggart points to Isaiah Berlin’s ‘Cinderella complex’. He argues that “the Cinderella complex of populism, whereby we seek a perfect fit for the ‘slipper’ of populism, searching among the feet that nearly fit but always in search of the one true limb that will provide us with pure case of populism” (Berlin, 1968, as cited in Taggart, 2000: 2).

Although populism is a recently risen phenomenon, it has been studied for several decades. The concept appeared in different times and different regions. For instance, Karaömerlioğlu (1996), states that a group of people in Russia identified themselves as narodniki, so called the populists, and their effects have been seen even in the 19th century revolutions. At the same time, populist movements have been observed in the United States. Ferkiss (1957), argues that populist movements can be associated with a “primarily agrarian revolt against domination by eastern financial and industrial interests” (Ferkiss, 1957:352).

According to Paul Taggart, due to the nature of populism, populism appears in political spheres only in extraordinary situations. He claims that “at its root, populism, as a set of ideas, has a fundamental ambivalence about politics, especially representative politics. Politics is messy and corrupting, and involvement comes only under extreme circumstances” (Taggart, 2000:3).

Populism is an outcome of distinctive social, cultural, and political contexts as is almost every political phenomenon. Populism does not have a certain form that perfectly fits any time or space. Cas Mudde points out that what a “... specific form of populism ends up adopting is related to the social grievances that are dominant in the context in which it operates” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017:40). Furthermore,

Panizza states that “while there is no scholarly agreement on the meaning of populism, it is possible to identify an analytical core around which there is a significant degree of academic consensus” (Panizza, 2005:1). Also, some scholars associate populism with particular titles or expressions. For example, Jan Werner Müller (2017), states that “populism is associated with particular mood and emotions: populists are angry, their voters are frustrated, or suffer from resentment” (Müller, 2017:1). Also, he has claimed that “populism as a term is frequently used as a synonym of anti-establishment” (Muller, 2017:1).

Is populism the expression of those who do not coincide with the rest of society? In other words, should populism be defined as a different voice in liberal democracy. According to Chirstopher Lasch, populism is “an authentic voice of democracy” (cited Müller, 2017:1). I focus on three main approaches to populism literature in science from many trends.

### **3.3 MAIN APPROACHES TO POPULISM ANALYSIS IN THE LITERATURE**

The examination of key features and variations of populism allows a systematic identification to be possible . Despite all the different definitions, the notion of populism has been generalized under 3 main headings of populism; 1) as an ideology, 2) as a discourse, 3) as a style. (Moffitt&Tormey 2013, Gidron&Bonikowski 2013, Mudde&Kaltwasser 2011, Moffit 2016, Erdoğan&Erçetin 2019).

#### **3.3.1 Populism as an Ideology**

One of the characteristics of populism that many researchers and academics agree on is that it is ideology. Cas Mudde (2004), Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), Paul Taggart (2000), Jan-Werner Muller (2016), Ben Stanley

(2008), Yves Meny and Yves Surel (2000), Albertazzi and McDonnel (2008) also Benjamin Moffit (2016) -with little differentiations- agreed with Cas Mudde's (2004; 2007;2009;2011;2017), and on the same page they point out that "populism always involves a critique of the establishment and an adulation of the common people" (idib). Mudde has defined one of the most recognized to be valid conceptualization of populism ;

Populism as a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde, 2004:543).

One of the most important features of Mudde's thin-centred ideology approach to populism is its attachability. Attachability to other concepts and ideologies such as nationalism and socialism, provides flexibility to populism. Although this feature of populism may take very different shapes and portrayals, populism maintains its core concepts. Mudde and Kaltwasser points out that "... the core concepts of populism appear to be related to other concepts, forming interpretative frames that might be more or less appealing to different societies" (Mudde&Kaltwasser, 2017:6). Therefore, it can be used as a tool to understand a political reality.

Also, they claim that "... it appears in combination with, and manages to survive thanks to, other concepts" (Mudde&Kaltwasser 2017:7). Paul Taggart indicates populism as an 'epithet' (Taggart, 2000:5) and 'chameleonic quality' (Taggart, 2000:4). He also, with some differentials, agrees that an ideological approach to populism has features that are able to integrate specific environments in which it finds itself. He mentions that "populism appears not only in many different places and times but also in different forms. As an epithet, 'populists' have been fitted to movements, leaders, regimes, ideas, and styles" (Taggart, 2000:5).

Populist logic instrumentalizes dichotomization of society or dichotomized societies. Also, populist ideology intensifies and cements the idea of pure and not-

disoriented people. Muller (2016) points out that “whoever does not support populist parties might not be a proper part of the people -always defined as righteous and morally true” (Muller, 2016:3). The notion of ‘the people’ mostly refers to the nation and sovereign. Stanly (2008), cites Canovan’s (2005) state that “popular sovereignty is, the ‘foundation myth’ of modern representative politics; the notion that we, the people, are somehow the source of political authority” (Canovan, 2005, as cited in Stanly, 2008:101).

### **3.3.2. Populism as a Discourse**

The second approach to populism characterizes it as a discourse, rhetoric, and language. This definition of populism is mostly based on the relationship between populist leaders, populist parties and the people whose needs and priorities have not been supplied or fulfilled by elites-government. Taggart refers to Edward Shils’s point of view which claims that “populism exists wherever there is an ideology of popular resentment against the order imposed on society by a long-established, differentiated ruling class which is believed to have a monopoly of power, property, breeding and culture” (Shils 1956, cited Taggart 2000:11).

Although the approach to populism as a discourse has similarities with ideational populism, populist rhetoric goes beyond the ideational populism core which is based on separation of two groups, the pure people and corrupt elite. Kazin (1995), who studied political milestones in the United States (US) using a populist rhetoric analysis, also explains populism in the US as more than political ideologies but also as political expression and/or rhetoric. Even his analysis highlights that populist language has not been used only by liberals but also by conservatives (Kazin, 1995). Laclau, with little doubt, is in the same line of thinking. In his famous book *On Populist Reason*, he deeply analyses the core concept of populist rhetoric which makes ‘clear distinction’ between ‘us’ and ‘other’ in the specific content for ‘empty signifiers’ (Laclau, 2005). Furthermore, Dwayne Woods (2014), quotes Carlos de la Torre (2000), definition on populist rhetoric that “constructs politics as the moral

and ethical struggle between el pueblo [the people] and the oligarch” (Torre 2000, cited Woods&Wejnert, 2014: 15).

Even populist discourse enjoys concepts of ideational populism but also capitalizes on specific emotions and morality. Stanly (2005), summarizes conflated concepts that;

Critics of populism typically charge their targets with demagogic practices: for playing on popular emotions, making irresponsible and unrealistic promises to the masses, and stoking an atmosphere of enmity and distrust towards political elites (Stanly, 2008:101).

While being a populist is associated with a negative image/epithet, labelled/demagogic, they have struck back via “through the rhetorical flourish of accepting an epithet conferred by enemy” of course without its negative connotations (Stanly, 2008: 101-102). Although, Weyland (2013), defines populism as a strategy instead of discourse, both approaches are based on the same phenomenon. He points that “scholars argue that populism is a pragmatic tool to attract supporters and win political power” (Weyland et al. 2013:20). Also, in the same study it is claimed that “as a political strategy, populism can have variegated and shifting ideological orientations and pursue diverse economic and social policies” (Weyland et al. 2013:20).

The main conceptual differences between these two approaches is that while ideology is mostly innate and grows among people on an individual level, discourse is constructed generally by political leaders or on a political party level. In other words, discourse is constructed and more loudly repeated regarding certain feelings, values, and complaints. Instrumentalization of populist rhetoric pays off with voting and public support to populist parties and leaders. This framed speech has been used by populist representatives as political communication strategies which stir up feelings of resentment towards elites and establishments.

### 3.3.3. Populism as A Style

A third attempt to conceptualize the notion of populism is to analyze populism as a political style. This approach proposes more performative aspects of populism than ideology or discourse (Erdoğan&Erçetin, 2019; Moffit, 2016; Moffitt&Tormey, 2014; Hellström, 2013; Weyland, 2001; Taguieff, 1995; Harriman, 1995). The approach to populism as a political style seeks to ‘thicken’ conceptual phenomenon while narrowing time and space; bringing extended literature into the 21st century including highlighting the importance of the role of style and performance (Moffitt, 2016). According to Pierre Andre Taguieff, one of the key theorists, populism is not a specific ideology or a discourse, but a style. He formulates his definition of populism that “it does not embody a particular type of political regime nor does it define a particular ideological content” (Taguieff, 1995; cited in Moffitt, 2016:29).

Anders Hellström (2013), who studies populist symptoms and neo-nationalism in Scandinavia, also describes populism as a style which basically associates a ‘specific way’ of doing politics. He elaborates his definition, saying that “the populist style matches well with a medialized political landscape as the political form proves to be more significant for the political outcome, than its content” (Hellström, 2013:9). His conceptualization goes beyond dichotomization of the people against elites to an established and structured way of doing which is ‘strategic means’. He differentiates between populism as an ideology and style comply with analytical separation. His explanation and separation between politics is “politics as content (populism as ideology) and politics as form (populism as style)” (Hellström, 2013:10).

Benjamin Moffitt (2016), also regards populism as political style. He has designed a new frame to populism in which he claims political logic/ideology as being too broad and discourse theorists mostly paying attention to texts and misleading performance. He describes political style as “the repertoires of embodied,

symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life” (Moffitt, 2016:38).

It has been noticed that there are some overlapped motives between political style and political discourse. Political discourse, which has been framing specific language and is personified with political leaders or parties, does not focus on the channel between narrator (political party-leader) and the listener (supporters), including lack of examination of the non-verbal relationship between populist and followers. In this sense, Moffitt’s point of view on ‘new’ explanation of political style moves beyond the features of political discourse to “taking in aesthetic and performative elements” in which includes “images, self-representation, body language, design and staging” (Moffitt, 2016:40). In the same line, Hellström (2013), claims that “populism as style refers to the personalization of politics, an emphasis on charismatic leadership and the medialization of mainstream politics” (Hellström, 2013:10).

While almost every mainstream politician speaks in the name of ‘the people’, Moffitt and Tormey (2014), are asking the questions of what makes a person populist and what kind of features need to be met to be called as populist? They have come up with three elements/features of political style: an appeal to ‘the people’ vs ‘the elite’; bad manners, and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat (Moffitt&Tormey, 2014: 391-393). However, a political style approach is directing us to focus on more verbal and non-verbal performative action of political representatives and to examine their motives/motivations/behaviours as a practical study. It is not far from the discourse approach and may be more of an attachment to discursive studies.

### **3.4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this chapter has summarized main approaches to the concept of populism. As it was mentioned above, many scholars constantly argue that populism does not have a certain form that perfectly fits a specific time or space. Although the notion of populism is far away from a single definition, this is a contested phenomenon. There are many scholars who have conceptualized and framed populism by narrowing the definition or concerted features of the phenomenon.

While Taggart, Cas Mudde and Kaltwasser lead the approach in which populism is more of an ideology (thin), Laclau, Kazin, Stanly and de la Torre see populism as more discourse than ideology. Also, there are some scholars like Knight, Canovan, Moffitt and Tormey who explain the phenomenon as political style. Of course, there are lots of valuable conceptualizations and explanations of populism out there. For example, Chiara De Cesari and Ayhan Kaya , (2019) explain it as “ response to and rejection of the order imposed by neoliberal elites” combining with “structural inequalities” including dissatisfaction of cultural changes (Kaya&Cesari, 2019).

The main purpose of this comparison of approaches is to underline a theoretical overview on populist studies that lights the way in order to locate the AfD on the populism spectrum for revealing the party’s anatomy. In the next chapter, for the sake of the main object of the thesis, symptoms of populist behaviour of the AfD have been tested. This explains not only a national level of success of the party but also how AfD conceptualizes the populist fear in order to achieve its goals.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **POPULIST ANATOMY OF AfD**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the establishment of the AfD is explained to provide pre-knowledge about the party. Then, the AfD is examined through the features of populism which have been mentioned and clarified in the third chapter. This is done in order to reveal its anatomy and test its populist symptoms.

#### **4.2 FOUNDING OF THE PARTY**

Alternative for Germany was founded in February 2013. The founders of the party, Konrad Adam, Alexander Gauland and Bernd Lucke, started a political group called Electoral Alternative 2013. Electoral Alternative 2013 (original: Wahlalternative 2013), mainly focused on the euro-crisis in the same line as Free Voters. However, even Free Voters did not accept to be knit in with the AfD. In a short period of time, the AfD strengthened its party structure and took the main party positioning itself against the euro-crisis. In other words, at first, the AfD was aiming to capitalize on the position that represents growing resentment towards the crisis. Gradually, with some ups and downs, in the last seven years, the AfD has increased its party members.

Furthermore, Young Alternative for Germany (Junge Alternative für Deutschland), known as the youth branch of the party, was founded in 2013 in order to increase the number of members and strengthen its ideology.

Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Federal Central Office for Political Education, 2017) reported that the party had 20,728 members at the end of 2014, lost about a fifth of its membership in 2015 by splitting off the wing around Bernd Lucke, and increased to over 26,000 members by mid-April 2017 (BPB, 2017).

The German newspaper Zeit published the official number of party members in 2020, showing that the AfD has grown by 1,600 members. According to the AfD office, there were around 4,000 resignations last year and around 5,600 new members were accepted. On New Year's Day this year, it was recorded to have just over 35,100 followers. Exactly a year earlier, there were just over 33,500 (Zeit, 2020).

At the same time the AfD has steadily increased electoral success in the last seven years. In 2013, just seven months later, even without staff infrastructure and a proper platform, the AfD gained 4.7 percent in the federal election. However, it was not enough for representation in the Bundestag because of the 5 percent threshold. In the same year, during state elections, the AfD again failed to gain representation in parliament. According to Bundeswahlleiter, called the German Federal Election Office, the AfD became the fifth party just after Die Linke (The Left) party in Germany (7.1 percent) with 2.070.014 votes in the 2014 European Parliament election.

Although the AfD was accepted to the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) which is a Eurosceptic European Parliament group, after 2 years the party (2016), was expelled/excluded from the ECR due to the AfD's relationship and close ties with Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). The 2016 State Elections were the milestone for the AfD's success and appearance in the political sphere. The party won 24.2 percent of votes and was the second party in the Saxony-Anhalt state assembly and in the Baden-Württemberg state election, where the AfD reached third place. Furthermore, the party's success was lasting in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state election where the AfD got 20.8 percent of votes and reached the second party position.

In the Berlin state election, where the AfD ran the election for the first time, it succeeded in getting support of 14.2 percent of votes and became the fifth party in the state assembly (Berlinwahltageschau).

As was mentioned above, the AfD's first federal election experience got 4.7 percent of votes and failed to enter Parliament (2013). However, after four years (2017 federal election), the AfD increased its public support and became the third party in the Federal assembly with 12.6 percent of votes and received 94 seats (Bundestag Official Webpage).

Hence, the AfD has only existed for seven years as an anti-euro party, and the AfD party program platform has widened to include other issues related to identity, culture, immigration, and Islam in which party and representatives' language increasingly is seen as populist in tone. In the next chapter, the AfD's position on the political spectrum, according to literature discussing the features of populism, has been analysed.

In order to construct the anatomy of Alternative for Germany, I have summarized main definitions and symptoms in Table 1 to guide locating AfD in literature which analyses the features of populist ideology. This thesis focuses on the populist spectrum rather than on AfD's political party spectrum where it locates itself. In order to state AfD's political position on the populist spectrum, this thesis has used a qualitative research method. Due to this methodology of collecting data for analysis, the AfD's self-description, discourse, campaign materials and party structure have been investigated.

#### **4.3 ANALYSIS OF POPULIST SYMPTOMS OF THE AfD**

For the sake of this thesis, this section provides a summary of the relative dimensions of populism approaches. It has been divided by considering features of each approach. In order to be clear regarding the division of each path, this chart helps to differentiate between analytical approaches attributed to populist

ideology, as well as provide a clearer picture of the AfD’s anatomy. Below, the chart defines the main definitions of each approach and underlines specific symptoms in order to analyse the AfD’s populist behaviour.

**Table 1. Features of the three approaches to populism**

| Approach                | Main Definition  | Symptoms  |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Populism as an Ideology | ‘‘ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups’’  | Notions of: ‘‘The people, the corrupt elites, general will’’                      |
| Populism as a Discourse | ‘‘rhetoric that constructs politics as the moral and ethical struggle between the people and the oligarchy’’ | Notions of: ‘‘Anti-establishment, morality, demagogic practises’’                 |
| Populism as a Style     | ‘‘the repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated verbal and non-verbal performance’’                     | Notions of: ‘‘Personalization of politics, medialization of mainstream politics’’ |

### **4.3.1 AfD in Populism as an Ideology Approach**

First of all, as is mentioned above, Cas Mudde's definitive approach to populism as thin-centred ideology helps us to distinguish populist ideology from others. In his description there are three main notions respectively; 'the pure people', 'the corrupt elites' and 'general will' (Mudde, 2004). Also 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elites' have been clearly divided into two camps. Furthermore, only 'the people' are seen as the legitimate source of general will, therefore an ideational populist approach points out that 'the elites' are seen as a barrier in front of 'the people' who cannot express themselves.

According to the ideational approach to populism, there are three main and common concepts that are similar in populist ideologies which are respectively 'the people', 'the corrupt elites', and 'general will'. As an analytical definition of separative ideology has been made, there is also another point which must be clarified regarding who is included and excluded. Berbuir, Lewandowsky, and Siri (2014) state that populist ideology "... do not only define who they fraternize and who they segregate from" (Berbuir, Lewandowsky & Siri, 2014:30). For the sake of mapping the AfD in a populist ideological approach; party programmes, leader speeches, and election posters have been analysed as a source of material.

As it has closely looked at the AfD's party programme, the Local newspaper says that the AfD party programme argues that "Germany has a class of career politicians, who impose their own top interests of their power, their status and material well-being" (The Local, 2016). This can be seen as an example of the AfD segregating itself from those politicians who are named 'the elites'. Of course, only opposing the elites is not a sufficient enough feature which makes a person or a party populist. However, structural and rapid acts of resentment towards elites and excluding them from the general will, proves that it shows populist notions. Speaking of general will and the people's demand, the AfD scream out that "only the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany (DBR) can end these illegitimate

conditions ‘’(BPB, 2018). Thomas Klikauer (2018) suggests that one of the most successful techniques for reducing power of its opponents is one of “AfD’s key ideologies, namely the idea of the so-called people’s community (Volksgemeinschaft)” (Klikauer, 2018: 79). I argue that the idea behind the designation of an old/new expression of ‘Volksgemeinschaft ’ is to separate itself from those that are not part of them but current rulers of the state.

The Guardian newspaper states that Alexander Gauland, who has served as party leader, claimed during the 2017 election campaign that “we will take back our country and our people” (The Guardian, 2019 ). Since the AfD became the main opposition parliamentary group in Bundestag, Gauland proposed a new party aim providing strong opposition to the ‘elite and technocratic government’. He includes that “we will hunt them. We will hunt Mrs. Merkel or whomever. And we will take back our country and our people” (CNN, 2017). The AfD cleverly sustains the slogan, ‘we are the people’ not only during the election campaign but also through all speeches and written materials which have increased the voting rate as well as protests by the society who do not have a sense of belonging to the AfD’s ‘the people’ description.

Daniel Baron who made an excellent study on identification of AfD supporters states that “... as well as anti-elitist ideologies, thereby addressing especially those groups among the German electorate who felt abandoned by the established German parties when it came to policy issues that dealt with problems around migration, European integration, or economic welfare” (Baron, 2018:5).

Reductionist dimensions of ‘the people’ became the central definition of the das Volk. In other words, the AfD has started to define ‘the people’ with some excluded citizens who are not of the German race. During the 2015 election campaign Höcke stated that there are ‘ only 64.5 million Germans without migration background” and the “only 64 million native-born Germans”—an essentialist reduction that set clear limits on the surplus meaning that “the people” could accommodate’ (Kim,

2017:7). To sum up, due to the data, examples, and reflections of ideational populism, it can be stated that the AfD shows symptoms belonging to populist ideology. However, for the sake of more accurate positioning other approaches also have been examined.

### **4.3.2 AfD in Populism as a Discourse Approach**

In this section of the chapter, I have analysed the notion of discursive populist samples which is beyond dichotomization of ‘the people’ and ‘the corrupt elites.’ It includes anti-establishment ideas which put a moral distance between ‘pragmatic oriented elites’ and ‘abandoned people’.

Indeed, the AfD has oriented its political agenda on representing ‘the people’ who are claimed to be excluded from the political realm. Widening the gap between ‘the people’ and unresponsive political elites, including dissatisfaction with the established parties and institutions, is constantly instrumentalized by the AfD in every stage.

As it has been discussed in the populist literature chapter, a discursive approach has instrumentalized dichotomization of society . Also, populist ideology intensifies and cements the idea of pure and not-disoriented people. Muller (2016) points out that “whoever does not support populist parties might not be a proper part of the people -always defined as righteous and morally true” (Muller, 2016:3). The notion of ‘the people’ mostly refers to the nation and sovereign which is somehow a source of authority.

When AfD’s language has been analysed closely, particularly regarding federalism, the euro, multiculturalism, immigration and Islam there are some degree of populist symptoms. For instance, Spiegel newspaper argues that “by advocating a break from consensus-oriented politics and decrying political correctness as a burden on

free speech, the party is aligning itself with other right-wing populist movements across Europe” (Spiegel, 2013).

In light of Muller’s (2016) definition of populism as “ anti-elite politics, also anti-pluralist and usually based on a type of identity politics” (Muller, 2016:3), AfD’s official website contains many examples of those notions. For example, on multiculturalism, the official webpage of AfD (2017), admits that “the ideology of multiculturalism is a serious threat to social peace and survival of the nation state”, it also claims that instead of multiculturalism, “German cultural identity” should be protected and become “predominant” (AfD, 2017: 46).

As an example of the reductionist dimension of ‘the people,’ the AfD’s key figure Alexander Gauland in the 2016 election campaign, argued that representatives and MPs in the federal government should be replaced with only Germans instead of people from all around the world. Also, the same rhetoric was repeated by Alexander Gauland in 2017 again. He referred to the Donald Trump and called for a travel ban on Muslim countries, and claimed that “ not everyone who holds a German passport is German, referring to people with non-German roots” (DW, 2018). This reductionist and exclusionist form of rhetoric has been used by many AfD representatives but mainly by Höcke. His clear” construction of “the people” presupposed their exclusion through the elevation of a privileged differential particularity into a criterion of radical exclusion” (Kim, 2017: 7).

Höcke has referred to the Erfurt Declaration Resolution which addresses the AfD as a resistance movement against the further erosion of the identity of Germany in many cities during the rally (deutschlandfunk, 2019). Also Kim (2017), investigates that Höcke presented a starkly dichotomised image of a society in which “he interests of the people are trampled on by the political elite and articulated this conflict with reference to both the Euro and the decades-long cultural experiments”(Kim, 2017:8).

Furthermore, the AfD is strongly against Islam and Islamic symbols in Germany. The party claims that Islam is incompatible with German culture and does not belong to Germany (AfD, 2017). In the political programme of the party (2017), it has been noted that “the AfD firmly opposes Islamic practice which is directed against our liberal-democratic constitutional order, our laws, and the Judeo-Christian and humanist foundations of our culture” (AfD, 2017: 47-48).

Indeed, the hyperlink analysis conducted by Tabino shows that right-wing populist websites such as “Politically Incorrect” and “Christliche Mitte” which advocate anti-Islamification and tighter controls on immigration from Eastern Europe are often linked to AfD content. According to Tambino, the AfD is viewed in some circles as a legitimate mouthpiece for the right-wing populist cause (Spiegel, 2013).

### **4.3.3 The AfD in Populism as a Style Approach**

As mentioned above, political discourse which has framed specific language and been personified with a political leader or party does not focus on the channel between narrator (political party-leader) and the listener (supporters), including lack of examination of non-verbal relationship between populist and followers. In this sense, Moffitt’s point of view on ‘new’ explanations of political style moves beyond the features of political discourse to “taking in aesthetic and performative elements” in which includes “images, self-representation, body language, design and staging” (Moffitt, 2016:40). Furthermore, Kenneth M. Roberts highlighted broad explanations on how a leader or person is associated with a particular mobilization including personalization of politics. He claims that populism is more “the top-down political mobilization” which mass follows the charismatic leaders who “challenge established elites be half of the people” (Roberts, 2007:4).

In the last seven years, the AfD and “its leadership has gone through regular, turbulent changes” (BBC, 2020). Although AfD has been ruled by several leaders,

this thesis claims that none of them fit exactly this personalistic leader definition. Neither Gauland who is one of the founders of the party and still co-leader of both the national party organization and the Bundestag group, nor Höcke who is sharpest figure in the party and leading the far-right faction Flügel/Wing within the AfD are ‘the personalization of the core of AfD’s political identity’. As a populism as a style approach heeds the performance of the party leaders, in this sense Cas Mudde and C.R. Kaltwasser (2017), state that “the populist leader can portray himself as a clean actor, who is able to be the voice of the ‘man in the street’ since there are no intermediaries between him and ‘the people’”(Mudde&Kaltwasser, 2017:44). It is well known that the AfD has been strengthened by ‘street politics’ and ‘street protests’. The AfD has run as a business model, catering very well to ‘street demand.’ However, it was more party ideology than ‘charismatic leader’ leading this charge.

AfD leaders have always been tight with “PEGIDA’s Siegfried Däbritz, who organizes AfD’s anti-immigrant street mobilization. Unsurprisingly, Gauland was also among the first key AfD politicians to attend a PEGIDA demonstration in Dresden” (Open Democracy, 2019). Not only Gauland but also Höcke has been the leading speaker. Höcke's political performance brought notable success in Thuringia yet his speeches and ties with extreme groups have been criticized by some AfD members. For instance, Frauke Petry, who became party leader in 2015 after displacement of the party founder Bernd Lucke, has called Mr. Höcke a “burden on the party” (NY Times, 2017). After Andreas Kalbitz was kicked out of the AfD, a power struggle was underway in the party. Thuringia's AfD leader Björn Höcke stated that “I will not allow the division and destruction of our party - and I know that our members and our voters see it as I do”. Also he claimed that “AfD leader Jörg Meuthen and party vice Beatrix von Storch wanted another party” (MDR, 2020). Even Höcke does not want to cut his ties with the AfD, but it seems almost impossible for him to be accepted by the party members as a leader. Even so, there has been some performative populist rhetoric by AfD leaders for the past 7 years suggesting that the AfD has been lacking the ‘charismatic leader’ who is

defined in a populist style approach as presenting themselves as “the voice of the people, which means as both political outsiders and authentic representatives of common people” (Mudde&Kaltwasser, 2017:63), including embodying himself with the supporters. Instead, the party’s key figure, 79-year old Alexander Gauland, “is probably the opposite of what most would commonly associate with charisma” (Open Democracy, 2019).

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

Since 2013, the AfD has been showing different populist symptoms in different times and places. The AfD party program widened to other policies including identity, culture, immigration, and Islam in which party and representatives’ language has increasingly been seen as populist in tone. To start, with populism as an ideology, the AfD has shown many symptoms. This thesis mentioned that populist logic instrumentalized dichotomization of society or dichotomized societies. Also, populist ideology intensifies and cements the idea of pure and not-disoriented people. The AfD has several indicators that link to the populist ideology. Furthermore, the AfD perfectly segregates itself from those politicians who are named ‘the elites’. Regarding populism as discourse, this thesis has analysed the notion of discursive populist samples which is beyond dichotomization of ‘the people’ and ‘the corrupt elites.’ as well as anti-establishment ideas and morally distance between ‘pragmatic oriented elites’ and ‘abandoned people’. For example, the AfD’s 2017 manifesto includes such examples, the party claims that the European community has developed into an undemocratic construct, which is occupied by the political actors of Europe and is shaped by non-transparent, uncontrolled bureaucracies. The principles of subsidiarity and the prohibition of state liability for the debts of other countries set out in the European treaties are ignored. The policies of the EU institutions, in particular the European Council and the European Commission (EC), are dominated by the haggling over particular interests of individual states and lobby

groups. Competition is increasingly being choked by European regulatory fury. The democratic control of the EU institutions is completely inadequate, and the European Court of Justice (ECJ) does not take on this role, but persistently expands EU powers at the expense of sovereignty of the nation states. (AfD, 2017:11). However, even though there have been some populist style symptoms lately, the AfD is lacking ‘the charismatic leader’ therefore it kept the party a bit far from this approach. Gauland and Höcke may be seen as leaders but definitely not charismatic who can personificate ‘the people’.

In the last quarter of 2019, a new global crisis, COVID-19 appeared. All populist parties including the AfD have conceptualized the pandemic as an instrument to dichotomize ‘the people’ and ‘the elites’, including ‘old establishments such as WTO or EU. In the next chapter, this thesis analyses how COVID-19 as a global crisis has been integrated and instrumentalized in populist discourse by populist leaders and parties.

## CHAPTER V

### POPULISM AND COVID-19

#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the COVID-19 epidemic as a global crisis has been analysed in populist ideology. Indeed, populism simplifies all challenges and crises by accusing ‘elites’ and ‘establishments’. In other words, Ruth Wodak (2015), in her book, *The Politics of Fear*, claims that right-wing populist parties have been constructing ‘scapegoats and enemies’ in order to have ‘clear-cut’ answers for all ‘fears’ (Wodak, 2015:4). In populist ideology, ‘we’ as ‘the people’ has always been distinguished from ‘the others’. However, conceptualizations of ‘the other’ are changing according to the context. For example, while in the context of race, ‘others’ are foreigners, elites are not only national level politicians or liberals but also European level bureaucrats. Formulation of ‘the other’ is changeable, therefore, anything or anyone potentially can be identified as ‘the other’ for ‘strategic and manipulative purposes’. For that purpose, Wodak (2015), suggests that “discursive strategies of ‘victim–perpetrator reversal’, ‘scapegoating’ and the construction of conspiracy theories’ therefore belong to the necessary ‘toolkit’ of right-wing populist rhetoric” (Wodak, 2015:4). Indeed, separating society into two groups is the core strategy of the populist parties, including framing elites, minorities, and foreigners as the reason for all problems. In order to shed light on the connection between COVID-19 and populism, I have conceptualized COVID-19 as a micro-politics of populist parties’ so-called fear and threat to their life.

In the next section, the COVID-19 pandemic and its global impact has been highlighted. Specifically, the focus is on its impact on Germany. This is done in order to have a big picture of the AfD’s political manoeuvre and discourse shift towards the case. Later, this thesis analyses how COVID-19 has been

instrumentalized as a political tool to legitimize populist parties' policies and an excuse to blame minorities and 'old-establishments'.

## **5.2 COVID-19 DISEASE AND ITS IMPACT**

In this section, I summarize what COVID-19 is all about including how it turned into a pandemic and its impact on Germany. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a transmittable disease which was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. However, in about three months, COVID-19 was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) a pandemic on March 11, 2020. (WHO, 2020). The coronavirus disease turned into pandemic because of its spread worldwide and its effect on a large number of people around the world. By May 2020, COVID-2019 is affecting 212 countries and regions around the world (worldometers). John Hopkins University shares a daily report of the COVID-19 impact, showing that since the beginning of May 2020, there have been more than 3,9 million total confirmed cases, 271,881 global deaths, and about 1,35 million total recovered people (JHU, 2020). Lately, the United States, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Russia are the most infected countries.

### **5.2.1. Coronavirus in Germany: German society's "greatest challenge since World War Two"**

Those words were spilled out by Chancellor Angela Merkel. She called the COVID-19 pandemic the "greatest challenge since World War Two" for German societies. She said this with a politician's tone and with a scientist's calmness. The Chancellor said that 60-70 percent of the population may catch the coronavirus. While on one hand, Merkel was criticized for creating panic, she was also praised for her frankness and candour. The first official coronavirus case in Germany was detected on January 27. (Deutsche Welle (DW), 2020). After 100 days with coronavirus, as of May 6, 165 thousand people were infected and 137 thousand 400 people recovered. A total of 6,943 people died due to coronavirus. In the meantime, the

coefficient of transmission has been reduced to less than 1 and has recently been recorded as being between 0.7 and 0.8.

German officials have initiated some measures that aim to slow down the impact of the COVID-19. These measures are respectively; social distancing , closing borders and schools, including some shops in which public life has come to an unprecedented halt lately. Deutsche Welle news claimed that the main reason behind Germany's success in keeping the death rate low and recovered numbers up is: "Test, isolate, trace." DW states that "a decentralized yet comprehensive strategy is partly responsible for keeping the death toll relatively low, winning Germany both praise in international media and time in the battle against the outbreak" (DW, 2020a).

Surveys show that there is great public support to Merkel and the government thanks to their crisis management and measures which were taken in order to slow down the impact of COVID-19. Some surveys point out that "Merkel's popularity increased to 80 percent" (DW&Voanews, 2020).

### **5.3 INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF COVID-19 IN POPULIST RHETORIC**

In this section, this thesis analyses how COVID-19 has been instrumentalized in the political sphere in order to increase political power by ruling populist parties in Europe and the AfD as the main opposition party in Germany. The main parties tracked were the Fidesz Party in Hungary, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland, and the AfD in Germany. This thesis has discovered that particularly ruling populist parties have been using the COVID-19 pandemic to consolidate their Eurosceptic political ideology, thereby effectively eliminating opposition parties and media, including undermining liberal democracy. Also, during the pandemic crisis, discriminative discourses and xenophobic rhetoric have been shared by populist leaders.

Indeed, populist parties share an anti-elite and anti-international establishment rhetoric. Further, almost all global, regional and national level crises have been instrumentalized by populist rhetoric that “has been conceptualized to explain all woes. Wodak (2015), points out that populist parties do not rely on only specific forms of rhetoric but also particular content. She argues that populist parties “successfully construct fear and– related to the various real or imagined dangers – propose scapegoats who are blamed for threatening or actually damaging our societies” (Wodak, 2015:1).

Also, as it has been mentioned in the third chapter, Cas Mudde’s definitive approach to populism as a thin-centred ideology helps us to distinguish populist ideology from others. According to the ideational approach to populism, there are three main and common concepts that are similar in populist ideologies which are respectively ‘the people’, ‘the corrupt elites’, and ‘general will’. As an analytical definition of separative ideology has been made, there is also another point which must clarify who is included and excluded.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, populist ideology has absorbed the crisis to reproduce their own rhetoric. Populist parties argue that ‘corrupt elites’ do not consider the ‘will of the real people’, and they are mainly responsible for such a crisis due to the border regimes and migration policies. For example, since the first COVID-19 case in Hungary, Orban blamed foreigners and migrants for bringing the pandemic into Hungary. Agence France Presse (AFP, 2020), published that 14 Iranian students were expelled from Budapest, Hungary due to violating COVID-19 quarantine rules and regulations (Barrons, 2020). He tries to convince the people that he and his party are only focused on ‘saving the real Hungarian lives’. Basically, Orban has implemented further measures by setting up his conspiracy theories and fear rhetoric. For instance, Orban’s anti-migration discourse has been empowered by conceptualization of COVID-19 fear and blaming foreigners and migrations as ‘scapegoats’. His scapegoating rhetoric is not limited with anti-migration but also European elites who are easing the asylum seeker process.

Wodak's (2015) explanation of symptoms in populist content is very fit to the current pandemic. Shee states that they "produce and reproduce their ideologies and exclusionary agenda in everyday politics, in the media, in campaigning, in posters, slogans and speeches" (Wodak, 2015:2)

The notion of discursive populist samples is beyond dichotomization of 'the people' and 'the corrupt elites.' It includes anti-establishment ideas which put a moral distance between 'pragmatic oriented elites' and 'abended people'. Anti-elitism sometimes refers to the concept of national sovereignty in which populist ideology maintains that 'the elites' are willing to share national sovereignty with the European Union and such an international 'establishment' is dangerous for nation states and national sovereignty. Ironically, even populist parties are against international institutions claiming that it undermines 'general will' and sovereignty. During the pandemic some nation states criticized the European Union due to the financial support and solution. The populist narrative rhetoric of 'abandoned people' has found a ground for itself.

Anti-elitist and Eurosceptic rhetoric has boomed again during the COVID-19 outbreaks in Poland. Poland's prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki of the Law and Justice party is another European member states' leader that instrumentalized pandemic to create 'fear' in order to advance their political agenda under the cover of tackling the pandemic. He criticized the European Union, arguing that "EU has not contributed a single cent to fight the outbreak" (Global Council, 2020). He also turned to wearing 'national lenses' to blame elites, arguing that elites are only thinking about their own interest and power rather than individuals.

Reductionist dimensions of 'the people' became the central definition of *das Volk*. In other words, the AfD has started to define 'the people' with some excluded citizens who are not from the German race. During the 2015 election campaign Höcke stated that there are "only 64.5 million Germans without migration background" and the "only 64 million native-born Germans"—an essentialist

reduction that sets clear limits on the surplus meaning that “the people” could accommodate” (Kim, 2017:7). Not surprisingly, exclusionist and reductionist discourse have been used during the pandemic as well. The official AfD web page claimed that while ‘Germans’ are obeying COVID-19 restrictions and rules, refugees and those from ‘migration backgrounds’ are not. The AfD sensationally framed it as Ausgangsperre auch für Flüchtlinge!“ meaning “curfew also for refugees!” (AfD, 2020). The exclusion dimension lives on through the notion of being ‘threatened by outsiders’. Wodak (2019), argues in the same way populists “construct threat scenarios” where “the homeland or the “we” is threatened by “others”: strangers within and/or outside society” (Wodak, 2019:198).

Another common feature of populist ideology is a simplistic explanation for all problems. (Wodak, 2015, 2019; Muller, 2016). Diehl (2017), claims that populist leaders or parties; “Instead of discussing and providing solutions for major socio-political problems such as globally rising inequality and youth unemployment, and the consequences of climate change for migration politics, refugees and migrants serve as the scapegoat and simplistic explanation for all woes” (Diehl, 2017: 27-29, cited in Wodak, 2019: 197). Some populist leaders and parties have performed the same attitude as Diehl pointed out.

Furthermore, while populist ideology conceptualizes and frames ‘the scapegoat’, discriminative language is always obvious. For example; the United States (US) president Trump is not so different from other populist leaders. He has used ruthless language to frame the COVID-19 pandemic. He referred to the pandemic several times as the “Chinese virus” or/and the “Wuhan virus”. His language and rhetoric due to the conceptualized Coronavirus disease has been criticized by many national and international actors, arguing that Trump's language is xenophobic and discriminative. However, he keeps using the same language as it is. It is affecting individuals on a grand scale through xenophobic manners and insulting attitudes towards Asian-American society.

Additionally, specifically populist ruling parties expand their political power due to tackling the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, on 20th of March, 2020, the Hungarian Parliament website, posted a new draft of a bill which allows “the government to indefinitely extend the country’s state of emergency” (DW, 2020b). Prime Minister Orban assured the national assembly that “When this emergency ends, we will give back all powers, without exception” (Jacobinmag, 2020). Orban and his party have been criticized for a long time by the international community due to the political changes and undermining of checks and balances in Hungarian democracy. Iratxe Garcia, the leader of a political group in the European Parliament called The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), states that “Orban has crossed all red lines. Hungary is becoming the first dictatorship in the European Union and we will not accept it” (Socialists and Democrats, 2020). However, this thesis does not involve this debate and only focuses on what has been changed during the pandemic.

Even Hungarian officials claim that the new law is framed and going to be used only to deal with COVID-19. However, it will not be surprising if Victor Orban and his party instrumentalize this legislative power to consolidate his power or even extend it. Also, in order to eliminate the opposition party and media, Viktor Orban, thanks to a new bill, is able to jail journalists who spread false information about COVID-19. In other words, in the name of the pandemic, Orban has ‘locked down’ all opposition parties, including media and elites.

Furthermore, a Polish presidential election is set to be held on 10th of May 2020. The surveys showed that the opposition presidential candidate Malgorzata Kidawa-Blonska increased her popularity in the beginning of the pandemic and she may reach 49.91% just behind the Law and Justice party’s candidate Duda. However, she has been forced to stop her campaign due to the pandemic, as a result current polls noticed that her support decreased to 44.12%. (DGAP,2020). It has been shown that Polish populist party also ‘locked down’ its opposition by pandemic excuse.

The AfD has been recently struggling with how to conceptualize the COVID-19 crisis in its 'normal' populist rhetoric. From February to May, the party has changed their tone and re-produced their language and discourse. Since the outbreak of the corona pandemic, allegations against politics, science and the media have changed greatly. Until April, the 'alternative media' wrote that Chancellor Angela Merkel did not protect Germany sufficiently and that the corona dead were to be attributed to her. A few weeks later, the tenor changed fundamentally. Then, populists claimed that "the people are fighting against the Corona dictatorship" (Tageschau, 2020). It is also populist symptoms that claim the old-establishments (government) to dictatorial action as corrupt and to present itself as the only true opposition which cares about 'the real people's interests.

Populist ideology intensifies and cements the idea of pure and not-disoriented people. Muller (2016) points out that "whoever does not support populist parties might not be a proper part of the people -always defined as righteous and morally true" (Muller, 2016:3). The notion of 'the people' mostly refers to the nation and sovereign which is somehow a source of authority.

As mentioned before, 'nationalism' and 'nativism' (Wodak, 2019) strongly supports 'closed-border' and 'anti-migration' policies. At first, AfD politicians cheered the closed borders and stronger national focus. Beatrix von Storch, among the party's leaders, said the virus proved the "failure of border-free globalization" and called for the new border controls to remain permanent (ForeignPolicy, 2020). The AfD has been trying to stick to its usual divisive topics. It advocates continued border closures, initially speaking of "corona migrants" or calling for the suspension of support for renewable energy during the pandemic. These dichotomized populist ideologies do not only construct on 'we' and the 'other', but also the notion of 'the other' is often criminalized by context. For instance, in this case, the COVID-19 disease is associated with migration. Therefore it seems like migrants are a dangerous threat and even disease, just as much as COVID-19.

In light of Muller's (2016) definition of populism as "an anti-elite politics, also anti-pluralist and usually based on type of identity politics", the AfD's official website contains many examples of those notions. For example, on multiculturalism, the official webpage of the AfD (2017), admits that "the ideology of multiculturalism is a serious threat to social peace and survival of the nation state". It also claims that instead of multiculturalism, "German cultural identity" should be protected and become "predominant" (AfD, 2017: 46). Furthermore, the AfD is strongly against Islam and Islamic symbols in Germany. The party claims that Islam is incompatible with German culture and does not belong to Germany (AfD, 2017). In the political programme of the party (2017), it has been noted that "the AfD firmly opposes Islamic practice which is directed against our liberal-democratic constitutional order, our laws, and the Judeo-Christian and humanist foundations of our culture" (AfD, 2017: 47-48). During the COVID-19 crisis, Frank Grobe, member of the AfD, wore a mouthguard (mask) with the words "Merkel-Burka" commenting on the islamization of Germany.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, populist governments and leaders in power to some extent, have seemed to consolidate their power or even strengthen it during COVID-19 by making use of the pandemic to establish a permanent state of emergency and/or eliminate oppositions. These governments have been exposed by many critics for undermining democracy and freedom restrictions. However, at least in this point, populist governments and leaders do not look like they wish to hear these criticisms. On the other hand, it is not possible to say the same for populist parties not in power. They are not being strengthened as much as populist parties in power. In times of crisis like COVID-19, it seems that society wants more scientific data rather than populist criticism and demagoguery. As Muller (2020) states, "Populism is not primarily characterized by hostility to scientists. Populists in power are likely to benefit from a rally-around-the-flag dynamic, unless they appear as do-nothing

retrogrades” (Muller, 2020). For this reason, the concepts of otherization and scapegoatism, where the populist parties get the most power, does not seem to get much support.

Muller (2020), states that “the very real suffering caused by COVID-19, rather than inspiring structural reform, might become part of the narratives circulating in a right-wing culture of grievances, carefully tended by populists who make majorities feel like minorities under siege. Even if the enemy is invisible, the lived experience of vulnerability might still be incorporated into the populist playbook” (Jan-Werner Muller, 2020).

Indeed, to some extent, opposition parties such as the AfD have lost their popularity during COVID-19 times. So, is there any kind of transformation taking place within the AfD supporters? If so, in which direction did this occur? As it has been already argued, populist parties are likely to have an ‘anti-elite’ and ‘establishment’ ideology. The main claim is that elites are corrupt and self-interest oriented, and therefore every time consider their interest first and never care about the good of ‘the people’. In light of this argument, the main purpose of the thesis is to analyse if there has been a perception shift among AfD supporters toward national elites and international organizations like the European Union during COVID-19. In the next chapter, AfD’s political performance has been analysed by an examination of social media success and re-production of populist COVID-19 rhetoric.

## CHAPTER VI

### POLITICAL PERFORMANCE OF AfD SINCE COVID-19

#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this chapter is to define, underline and discuss the political performance of AfD since the first COVID-19 case appeared in Germany until the middle of May, 2020. Firstly, this chapter underlines the importance of social media for the AfD in order to constantly indicate its presence and sense of reachability among its supporters. For instance, the AfD is at the top regarding its social media followers and interaction with supporters on Facebook and Twitter. As it has been discussed, the AfD has lacked a 'charismatic leader'. Social media fills the deficiency of charismatic leadership in order to achieve the party's objectives. However, indicators show that from the end of January to the end of April, the AfD is losing its main social media power and political support.

In the rest of the chapter, the AfD's political and discursive manoeuvres during the COVID-19 crisis have been deeply analysed. As it is argued, the AfD, which incorporates populist party rhetoric, frames the national and international elites as 'scapegoats' in every crisis period. By bringing the crises into certain 'fear' forms, populist parties raise the level of anxiety in the society and defend themselves as a 'sole remedy'. Also, populist parties combine current crises with other problems of society. For example, while linking the migrant crisis to an increase in the unemployment rate; they match multiculturalism with the destruction of society's values.

In this process, the AfD resembles the logic of a "business model." The party has packaged shock and confusion in populist discourse and presented it to society again. In other words, they meet the 'need for explanatory demand' in the society with the supply which they set up using their own discourses. They then present

them to the society especially through the channel of social media tools. Therefore, in order to test the core statements of this thesis, it is important to deeply analyse the AfD's official statements, leader's social media posts and tweets from the first day that COVID-19 appeared in Germany to the second week of May. These have been analysed using discursive methodology. All official statements and social media posts have been critically analysed and collected in the Appendix (see Appendix A).

## **6.2. SOCIAL MEDIA: AFD'S STRATEGIC TOOL**

Social media is the main weapon that the AfD uses to achieve its political agenda and general purpose. There is no other political party that has achieved such a positive reaction from their supporters as much as the AfD via the internet. While the Green Party has 85.000 followers on Facebook, the CDU 219.000, and the SPD 211,000, the AfD has 527,000. (see Appendix B). One of the AfD's most successful features in the political sphere is attracting its supporters through forging a mood against government and elites without any confirmed accuracy.

But in the case of the corona crisis, the well-oiled social media machine of the AfD apparently has stuttered. This claim is supported by figures from the political and communication consultant Johannes Hillje. He has measured the AfD's total number of social media posts with supporters' reactions to those posts. He compared the results with before and after the corona crisis by social media analysis software and points out that "The AfD's strongest means of communication is losing its impact" (cited in Der Tagesspiegel, 2020a). In order to understand the difficulties that the AfD has gotten into, we should consider the nature of populist parties and how they increase their popularity. The AfD's social media effort has been envied by many political parties. However, it seems that the AfD has been losing its dominant channel to reach its supporters. Obviously, social media channels are still there and exist, but during a crisis either the AfD is not seen as a main information

resource, people are more into state-owned sources of information, or populist rhetoric is not strong/interesting enough to attract ‘the people’ -at least since the beginning of the crisis.

In the period between mid-March and early April, the interaction rate with contributions from the AfD posts almost halved compared to two randomly selected periods this year and last year. Not surprisingly, four of the weakest five Facebook posts in the past three weeks are about Corona. This includes, for example, a contribution in which the AfD provides tips on how to submit online applications to the employment agencies that are overwhelmed by the corona crisis. Among the five most successful Facebook posts in the past three weeks, only one article was about coronavirus which is *Ausgangssperre auch für Flüchtlinge!*“ meaning “curfew also for refugees!” (see Appendix A,32).

As it has been mentioned above, in times of crisis- particularly if it’s about health- people are more likely to get information from established media, research institutes and health authorities. In the past, the AfD mostly conceptualized and constructed ‘anger’ towards elites and government. It is classic wisdom which has it that populism is mostly about opposition to elites (see Appendix A,18-22-23-25-etc). Therefore, the party used it to trigger its reaction from its audience. However, it seems like it did not work during the early stages of the pandemic. In other words, as Hillje points out, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people changed their orientation to the so-called established media and researchers, instead of using AfD’s media channels. For example, since the pandemic has started, the public services broadcastings are currently used by two thirds of Germans daily and even several times a day.

The AfD, on the other hand, has built up alternative media channels, claiming that represents ‘real people’ and ‘independent’, and disapproving state-owned broadcasts are untrue in order to present their own information as true. If the party

can no longer penetrate its own channels and reach their own audience as much as the established media has reached, AfD's media strategy may collapse.

Since 1997, infratest dimap has used Sunday's question to determine the current political mood in Germany between elections. Infratest dimap asks around a thousand German citizens "Which party would you vote for if there were a general election next Sunday?" (Infratest Dimap, 2020). And the Figure 1 shows that AfD is losing its attractiveness since the beginning of May.

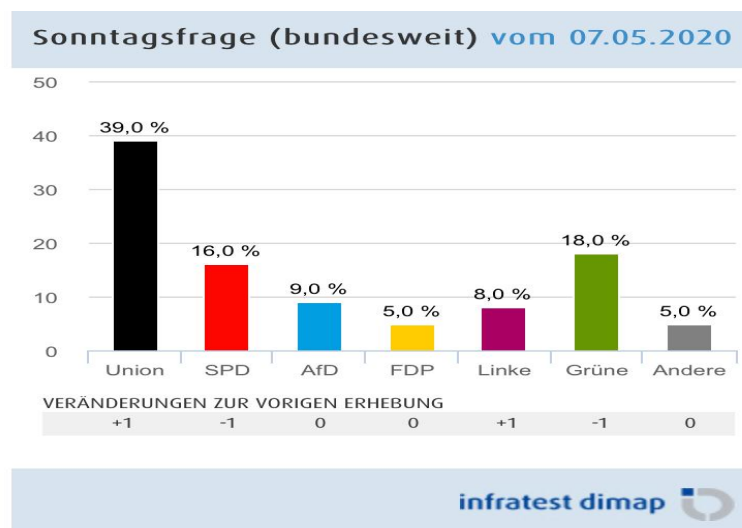


Figure 3: Infratest Dimap: Which party would you vote for if there were a general election next Sunday?

When analyzed in more detail, surveys point out that from the first case of COVID-19 in Germany till the first week of May, AfD lost around 5 points.

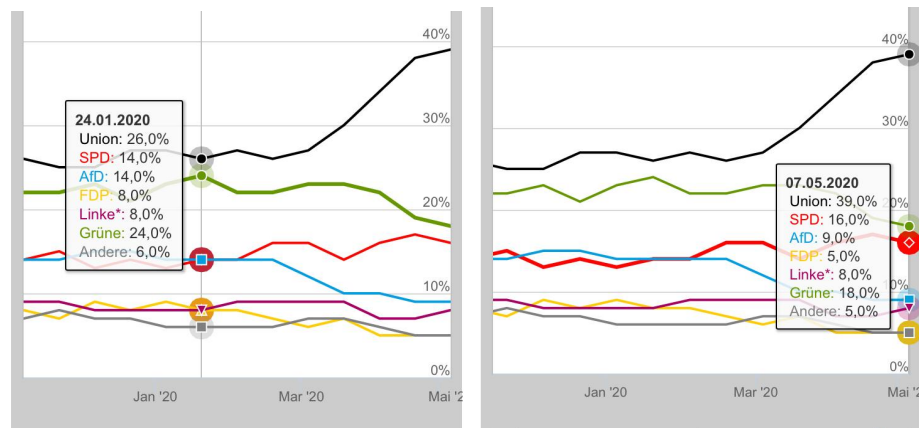


Figure 4: Infratest Dimap: the current mood of the electorate in Germany

According to Infratest dimap's survey, when the COVID-19 crisis had not yet appeared in Germany, the Union (Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU)) had 26 points. Since the first week of May, the Union increased to 39, while AfD lost 5 points and Grüne 6.

### 6.3. AfD'S COVID-19 STRATEGIES

In this section, the thesis tracks the AfD's strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany. The AfD's declarations, social media posts and leaders' speeches from January to May have been analysed using the descriptive method. In order to have a better look at the AfD's profile due to the re-production of COVID-19 rhetoric, this thesis focuses on AfD's discursive manoeuvre since the pandemic appeared in Germany. As it has been discussed in this section, in the beginning of the Corona crisis, the AfD has seemed silent. The AfD, contrary to what is usual, did not take a radical anti-position. The party did not have a consensus in order to determine its standpoint towards the pandemic and government policies or measurements. Later, the party found a way to associate the COVID-19 pandemic with other crises and fears such as the economic crisis and unemployment.

The first official statement of the AfD about the COVID-19 pandemic was declared on 30th of January in the Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) parliament. AfD members Herbert Strotebeck, Nic Vogel and Dr. Martin Vincentz asked 'kleine frage' a small question to the state government about the current coronavirus situation in NRW. The official question paper includes 5 main questions, mainly, suspected coronavirus cases in NRW, fever checks on passengers, and specific measurements regarding the COVID-19 at the airports (NRW, 17.Wahlperiod, 17/8550).

In the first month of coronavirus in Germany, the AfD did not really pay attention to the crisis. AfD officials mentioned the Corona crisis around five times in the entire month of February. AfD parliamentary group members mostly criticized the federal government's measurements. Also, another important reason behind why the AfD did not focus on the crisis was the Hanau attack on the 19th of February. There were 11 people who lost their lives in a far-right racist attack in Hanau. Far-right terrorists targeted two shisha bars and shot around. Following that incident, "the German government saw increased calls from people across the political spectrum to put the AfD under observation. A manifesto written by the perpetrator of the attack contained anti-migrant rhetoric that echoed AfD sentiments" (DW, 2020c). Alexander Gauland, the leader of AfD, stated about the attack in Hanau that "I find it shabby to exploit such a terrible act. All we know is that it is a mentally completely confused person" (AfDimBundestag, 2020).

Group leader Alice Weidel had warned in early March of the great dangers posed by the coronavirus. At that time, she asked for quick measures such as expanding treatment capacities in hospitals and closing the borders. During March, the AfD prepared some political advice, including the prevention of coronavirus at an individual level. Nonetheless, the party mostly blamed the federal government's measurements and EU elites handling of the crisis as insufficient. Moreover, they claimed that "we see that the EU is quite powerless during a pandemic. It is the time for the nation-states" (AfD Kompakt, 2020). Although, there were those who thought that the fear of the virus was exaggerated in the party (NDR, 2020), The AfD did not instrumentalize this rhetoric as a standing-point.

Additionally, another very significant event took place on 20th of March. There was Dissolvement of Höcke's Flügel (the Wing) from the AfD. The far-right faction within the AfD was declared and recognized as 'extreme' by the chief of Germany's domestic intelligence agency (BfV). It also mentioned that the extreme-right is the most dangerous threat to German democracy. The DW online points that The Wing/Flügel violated "characteristic features of the free democratic basic order, human dignity, democracy and the rule of law" (DW, 2020d). Höcke argued against the official statement. He claimed that "his calls for the de-Islamization of Germany and Europe are not directed against the freedom of religion anchored in the constitution (DW,2020c). Furthermore, another internal crisis of AfD took place which AfD's eastern state Brandenburg leader Andreas Kalbitz expelled from the party and it created such a division in the party delegation where eastern delegations against western (The Guardian, 2020).

On the 22th March, it was informed that Chancellor Angela Merkel's coronavirus test was positive. Then, Andreas Winhart, the AfD state parliament member made fun of Chancellor Angela Merkel's quarantine on Twitter. A member of the state parliament wrote: "Merkel in quarantine! Good, but behind bars would be better, but it is a start". After many criticisms, the tweet disappeared, and he tweeted that "If you are looking for a post here, you will no longer find it because it does not correspond to my opinion" (OVB-Online, 2020).

AfD's criticism was that the government was not acting decisively. At the beginning of April, the AfD voted for several measures by the federal government that were intended to mitigate the economic consequences of the corona crisis. However, the AfD supported new legislative proposals in the parliament. "Standing together is the first civic duty," said parliamentary leader Alexander Gauland. "We must all be aware that our country is at the beginning of the worst crisis since the Second World War and we all are affected. We will only be able to overcome this crisis 'together', not against each other" (piegel, 2020b).

After a long discussion, the parliamentary group finally decided on a position paper demanding that the economic restrictions and fundamental rights encroachments be relaxed and, if possible, lifted entirely. Weidel, Gauland and the party leaders Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla announced at the end of April the demand: “Immediate resumption of economic life!” (Appendix, A )

Weidel's parliamentary colleague Brandner goes one step further: he claims that the lockdown was completely unnecessary. The government initially overslept to react in good time. “And now people are trying frantically to take completely exaggerated measures to demonstrate their strength and to cover up their own failures” (AfD Kompakt, 2020). Even Chancellor Angela Merkel has been described as “chancellor dictator” by the party due to the ‘restrictions on the individual right’.

The AfD has tried to link the corona crisis with its core issue of migration. This can be observed, for example, the local representatives of the AfD tried to play off Christians against Muslims in Thuringia. The right-wing people pointed out that it was not possible to celebrate Easter, but “on time” two weeks later of the beginning of Ramadan, services are allowed again (Appendix A, 53).

Furthermore, with the increasing debate about the restrictions, the AfD changed its course - and is now trying to transfer its strategy combining the refugee crisis, economic consequences/crisis and the climate debate with the Corona crisis into creating ‘fear’ among societies.

In the beginning of May, the AfD officials wanted to try to get involved on the street and benefit from the growing resentment. In Magdeburg, for example, the AfD announced a demonstration at the end of April. The fact is that conspiracy theories and resentment and dissatisfaction towards the government is spreading. On 11th of May, in Berlin, one of the strongest demonstrations was held. There were thousands of people who had resentment about coronavirus measurements and impacts. The demonstration was operated by a new movement so-called the Widerstand 2020.

### 6.3.1. Widerstand 2020/ Resistance 2020



*Picture 1: RP-Online. 11 May 2020, Widerstand/Resistance 2020 demonstration, Alexanderplatz, Berlin*

Recently, due to criticizing federal governments' restriction on public life and 'fundamental rights' there is a new 'wave' which is the so-called Widerstand 2020 (which means Resistance 2020). Although there is no direct link between the Resistance 2020 movement and the AfD, the Party has benefited from the Resistance 2020 movement and its occupations. Founding members of Resistance 2020 are the entrepreneur Victoria Hamm from the Hanover region, the Leipzig lawyer Ralf Ludwig and the doctor Bodo Schiffman. Resistance 2020 does not yet have a program like a political party. However, ideas are listed on the group's website. According to its statutes, the new wave organization is committed to freedom issues. According to the founder Victoria Hamm, the movement is "not right, not left, but free". She also points out that "totalitarian, dictatorial and fascist aspirations have no place for this movement". The journalist Christian Schiffer sees resistance 2020 as a typical one-topic party for times of crisis in which he

criticizes anti-corona measures. From the point of view of Johannes Hillje, resistance appears to be forming in this party foundation initiative, which has so far been seen across party camps on the street. He recognizes "typical populist figures of thought" in the ideas of the initiative. All in short, the new wave has formulated the formation of a collective dissatisfied and frustrated, conspiracy tellers and COVID-19 vaccine opponents (RND, 2020).

#### **6.4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, AfD's 'business model' of rhetoric re-production has not seen much interest by the public. Particularly during the first stage of the coronavirus crisis, the well-oiled social media machine of the AfD apparently has stuttered. The AfD struggled with reaching out to its supporters and could not come up with 'standing points' against the coronavirus crisis. Therefore, the party lost its popularity and as a result party support decreased from 14 points to 9. However, at least from May on, the AfD has decided its standing point and is increasing its attractiveness again.

In short, the AfD's COVID-19 strategy can be categorized as respectively, complaining about insufficient measurements and policies during February and March, then while the party realized that 'the people' did not pay attention to AfD rhetoric and opposition, the party started to support the federal government coronavirus proposal. However, it did not take long before the party framed its rhetoric with 'impact of coronavirus measurements' on social, economic and political life in April. Late April, the AfD became an 'anti-lockdown' party (Appendix, A-55). The AfD have combined the coronavirus crisis with other problems such as economic problems, migration and the EU's 'inefficiency' in order to create 'structural fear' among people (see Appendix A, 17-26-54-59-60-etc). Thus, the AfD got support from people who are resentful about the current situation. In May, the AfD supported street demonstrations and occupations.

Although, there have been some studies and surveys showing that the AfD has lost or has been losing its political power, this thesis argues that the AfD will be stronger than before the crisis. In order to benefit from the crisis, the AfD luckily realized the effect of the virus on other problems and were in turn able to strengthen their standing point on the issues. If the AfD would conceptualize and instrumentalize the pandemic's impact, this thesis states that the AfD will get more support day by day. Further research could explore AfD's position and rhetoric in the aftermath of the pandemic.

## CHAPTER VII

### ANALYSIS OF THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

#### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

As mentioned before, this thesis conducted twelve (one on one) in-depth interviews with AfD supporters in order to analyse if there is a perception shift among AfD supporters towards national and European elites during the COVID-19 crisis. For the sake of the main argument of this thesis, this chapter overviews those twelve in-depth interviews using comparative analysis. Due to the coronavirus measurements in Germany, all in-depth interviews were conducted online via Zoom and Facebook video calls. Although this thesis collected data with the qualitative method, the quantitative method also has been used in order to generalize some common comments and similarities. One of the most important advantages of the online one on one in-depth interviews was that the environment for the interviewee was where he/she feels more comfortable and freer; less pressure and concern about the questions and communication. Particularly, having such an interview environment is a key factor to collecting more accurate answers from ‘sensitive groups’. Although the AfD supporters may not be seen as a ‘sensitive group’, still very unlikely to meet face to face with AfD supporters as a ‘foreign student’. Therefore, all interviews were conducted online and anonymously. The interview questions have been attached to the thesis as Appendix C and answers as Appendix D.

Before the comparative analysis of the interviews, this thesis will introduce the main profile of the interviewees. As it has already been mentioned, there were twelve interviews conducted. Interviews were conducted in English and German. There were 5 female and 7 male interviewees. The ages ranged from 22 to 64 years old. There were two university students, three self-employed, one retired, one businessman and five employed persons (Appendix, D). Interviewees are settled in Berlin and Brandenburg states.

## **7.2. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

The main purpose of this section was to conduct an analysis on AfD supporters regarding their coronavirus perceptions, including to what extent AfD's supporters changed their perception towards national and international organizations (mainly the European Union). In order to do that, interview questions were divided into four main parts; the first part starts with political participation. Here, interviewees were asked about their political activities and sources of information. The second part dealt with COVID-19 and how interviewees perceive the crisis including sources of information. Thirdly, questions were posed regarding the federal government and international communities' management and measurements during the pandemic. Finally, interviewees were asked about their expectations for the future.

### **7.2.1 Political Activities**

Most of the interviewees claim that they are interested in politics. Only Interviewee-3 and Interviewee-5 state that they are not really into politics. They have discussion in the immediate vicinity, participating in protests and voting. All interviewees are willing to vote however Interviewee-2 and Interviewee-11 are strongly against European Parliament election and they do not vote in that election. Although most of them are interested in politics, only four interviewees are party members (Interviewee-2,7,10,12). Also, the majority ( nine out of twelve) of the interviewees had participated in protests or were willing to participate. Only Interviewee-3,5,11 did not think of protests as the main part of political activities.

It is possible to observe similar rhetoric between the AfD and party supporters in terms of framing the 'other'. Most of the interviewees are familiar with social media platforms except Interviewee-10 who is 64 years old and he is more into reading and following printed newspapers (Appendix D, Interviewee-10). Some interviewees have claimed that mass media is a lie and fake, just as the AfD conceptualizes it. That's why Interviewees 2,4,6 claim that they do not trust the mass media, and they only use independent internet sources. For instance,

Interviewee-6 states that “I do not think that protests or boycotts truly help, as they often get unheard and twisted by mainstream media. Unfortunately, the influence of the media is very big and even though journalists should report independently, they are somewhat bound to their chief editors / publishing house. ‘Don’t bite the hand that feeds you’, seems to be the motto of many journalists these days” (Appendix D, Interviewee-6).

Also, in terms of framing sources of information, there are some online and offline newspapers that overlap among interviewees. Except Interviewees-3,9,10, the majority of the Interviewees specifically mentioned that the AfD’s official web sites, Facebook and Twitter accounts are political sources of information. Therefore, those official websites, Facebook and Twitter pages are checked regularly in order to follow German politics. Some interviewees mentioned alternative sources of information as well. For instance, while Interviewee-1 considers Tagesschau and Konfm as political sources of information, Interviewees (2,3,10,11,12) regularly read Bild, Die Welt and Frankfurter Allgemeine newspapers. They also follow Twitter and Facebook feeds. Furthermore, according to Interviewees (2,3,4,6,8,11,12), social media platforms are convenient to discuss politics, while Interviewee-7 and Interviewee-10 strongly oppose it (Appendix D, Interviewee-2,3,7,etc).

### **7.2.2. The Interviewees’ Perception of the COVID-19**

The coronavirus is well-known or fairly known by all interviewees except Interviewee-9 who stated that he has not been interested in it, including he has not been selective in terms of information sources (Interviewee-9).

At the same time, among the twelve interviewees, only Interviewee-7 specifically mentioned that he does not trust internet sources, particularly Twitter and Facebook. He is the only participant who followed the AfD’s websites regularly during coronavirus (Appendix D, Interviewee-7). Also, the majority of interviewees read

Bild, Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine, and Tagesschau online or published versions, and follow Facebook, Twitter and Youtube feeds during the pandemic. For example, Interviewee-11 uses Twitter as a main source of information during the pandemic. Although she does not trust the mass media, which claims that there is always manipulation by governments and misinformation, she has been following doctors' pages on Twitter regularly during the coronavirus crisis. She states that “especially on Twitter, we can follow lots of doctors' profiles and get information first hand. Mass media usually interprets the news but a doctor's profile says more than the mass media. Also, there is always a risk with the mass media, they might change some information or hide them from the people to prevent chaos. I mean the government might interrupt” (Appendix D, Interviewee-11). Those examples and data show that although AfD supporters have been following the party's websites and social media accounts often (Appendix D, Interviewee-1,2,4,6.etc), during the coronavirus crisis only the Interviewee-7 used AfD's websites as a source of information. In times of crises (particularly health crises), as it has been discussed, AfD supporters are more likely to get information from established media, research institutes and health authorities. In the past, the AfD mostly conceptualized and constructed 'anger' towards elites and government. It is classic wisdom which has it that populism is mostly about opposition to government and elites managements (see Appendix A,18-22-23-25-etc). Therefore, the party used it to trigger its reaction from its audience. However, it seems like it did not work during the early stages of the pandemic. In other words, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people changed their orientation to the so-called established media and researchers, instead of using AfD's media channels.

Furthermore, interviewees were asked about the main responsible cause for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the thought of many was China. However there were different thoughts as well. Respectively; while interviewees-1,5 claimed main responsibility as being China; Interviewee-2,11,12 said China, and WHO; Interviewee-3 said China and the federal government; Interviewee-8 claimed that main responsible agents are China and Italians; and Interviewee-10 stated that

China and Chinese people are the main responsible causes for the spreading of the coronavirus pandemic. Interviewee-7 claims that the main responsible one is Merkel. Also, Interviewee-4 and Interviewee-6 had different theories. While Interviewee-4 claimed that the foreign companies and foreigners are the main ones responsible, Interviewee-6 stated that “I am sure in a few years they will surprisingly find out that it was – against all odds – truly coming from a laboratory. I can imagine it's even a thing done by the US to start a war with China. They have their fingers in everything and I would not wonder if they actually started this whole pandemic” (Appendix D).

### **7.2.3. Interviewees' Perception Toward Elites**

As it has been discussed in depth in previous chapters, in populist discourse, ‘the elites’ are portrayed as a reason for all problems. In this study, the thesis has highlighted that euroscepticism and ‘anti-elite’ notions are the core value of the AfD. It is possible to see the reflections of those anti-elite, anti-European ideologies in AfD supporters as well. For instance, besides supporting the AfD, all interviewees had the same consensus on only one topic: the European Union was a failure during the coronavirus crisis (Appendix D).

When interviewees were asked about the European Union's performance during the pandemic, broad criticisms were raised about how the EU handled the crisis. For instance; Interview-2 stated that “I do not think that European Union was successful at all. The EU claims that we are together on everything including the pandemic, but they left Italy and Spain alone. They are hypocrites and even they could not prevent mask wars among its member states” (Appendix D, Interviewee-2). Also, another participant argued that “there is no difference between the WHO and the EU. They both are a joke. The EU couldn't protect the people, as they claim it is their job to make sure that people are happy and safe in the Union. But people are suffering. Also, they couldn't prevent the 2008 economic crisis and they do nothing to prevent the one which is coming after all this madness is over” on the same line

Interviewee-11 stated that “I think it blew in their face. They were speechless when the virus started to spread all over Europe. They couldn’t act. They say they are here to protect people in Europe but they did nothing while all those people in Italy and Spain were dying. And still, they are just watching, not acting” (Appendix D, Interviewee-11,12).

Furthermore, there were some interviewees who were not only complaining about the EU's performance during the pandemic but strongly against the existence of it. For instance Interviewee-7 stated that “we are good enough to cover up our problems and bring new solutions. Every country is responsible for their own actions. We do not need the EU” (Appendix D, Interviewee-7). And on the same line Interviewee-4 said that “I don’t believe in the European Idea! Where was the EU? Every member state started to protect itself” (Appendix D, Interviewee-4). Interviewee-10 argued that “thanks to the coronavirus crisis we again witnessed fakeness of the EU. Those elite are worthless” (Appendix D, Interviewee-10).

Furthermore, Daniel Baron, who made an excellent study on identification of AfD supporters, explains the factors “... as well as anti-elitist ideologies, thereby addressing especially those groups among the German electorate who felt abandoned by the established German parties when it came to policy issues that dealt with problems around migration, European integration, or economic welfare” (Baron, 2018:5). Also, this thesis conducted content analysis of the AfD’s performance during the coronavirus crisis and highlighted that the AfD has combined the coronavirus crisis with other problems such as economic problems, migration and the EU's ‘inefficiency’ in order to create ‘structural fear’ among people (see Appendix A, 17-26-54-59-60-etc). Thus, the AfD gained support from people who are resentful about the current situation. Interviewee-3 had an excellent example reflecting this. He claimed that the “European Union should not intervene in nation states business. The EU failed in the euro and migration crisis, we should not expect anything from the EU during any crisis” (Appendix D, Interviewee-3). The thesis has discussed that during the pandemic, the AfD changed its course several times. So far, the party has combined the refugee and economic crisis with

the coronavirus in order to create links between crises. Interviewee-3's claims can be counted as reflection of top-down rhetoric.

Populism always involves a critique of the old-establishment and elites. As Mudde and Kaltwasser conceptualize, "all forms of populism include some kind of appeal to 'the people' and denunciation of 'the elite'" (Mudde&Kaltwasser, 2017:5). Although all participants have been criticizing federal government pandemic measurements, there were some interviewees who agreed that the federal government managed the crisis well enough (Appendix D, 2,10,12). For example, Interviewee-8 and Interviewee-9 agreed that Germany managed the crisis much better than many countries. However, instead of the federal government, 'the people' and 'solidarity of the people' are the reason behind success.

Another interesting outcome is the reaction to the question related to what would happen if Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries. While two participants claimed that they had no idea about that (Interviewee-1,6), five out of twelve interviewees replied to the question somehow as "Germany does not have any obligation to help other countries" (Appendix D, Interviewee-3,9,10,11,12). Although two participants claimed that Germany has been helping Spain and Italy more than other countries, both of them stated that "first Germany, helping other countries later" (Appendix D, Interviewee-2,8).

A last notable outcome of the interviews is that ten out of twelve interviewees claim that they did not feel that if they were asked about their thoughts regarding precautions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic process. Only interviewee-7 did not answer that question and Interviewee-9 claimed that she felt like she was asked. She claimed that "Yes, the opinion of the people was taken into account. Otherwise, the state could have introduced a massive shutdown similar to that in Turkey, whose interference with fundamental rights would not be proportionate. As Germans, we attach great importance to the fundamental right of citizens. With this in mind, our state did the right thing" (Appendix D, Interviewee-9). This shows that the general idea of participants is that they feel their opinions have not been taken into account

by the federal government. It has strong link to the populist discourse where populist make majorities feel like minorities under siege.

### **7.3 CONCLUSION**

Twelve (one on one) in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve AfD supporters in order to analyse if there is a perception shift among AfD supporters towards national and European elites during COVID-19 crisis by using a comparative analysis method.

The thesis highlighted in the previous chapter that because of the internal and external crisis of the party, the AfD has had some difficulties in conceptualizing the coronavirus crisis. As a result, most of the interviewees stated that their source of information shifted towards other old-established newspaper or internet sources. Another possible explanation is that in times of crisis, particularly if it's about health, people are more likely to get information from established media, research institutes and health authorities. Although in April the AfD framed a specific speech which has been used by the party representatives as political communication strategies which stir up feelings of resentment towards federal government, elites and establishments, there were some participants who concluded that federal government performance and management of the coronavirus crisis well enough.

An important outcome of the in-depth interviews reflects the core purpose of the thesis: all interviewees agreed that European Union and elites are a failure in dealing with the pandemic. While many of the participants have criticized the European Union's performance, some of participants have blamed the European Union as a reason for the all crisis. This data shows that even though party members may change their perception towards federal government management during crisis, eurosceptic ideology and anti-elite behavior is still active and alive. Therefore, it can be deduced that COVID-19 has not changed the perception of AfD

supporters towards European Union and international elites. In the following conclusion, the main findings of this study will be summarized.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis has analysed how the COVID-19 global crisis has been instrumentalized in the populist rhetoric by the AfD, as well as discussed perception shifts among AfD followers towards national and international elites. Populism, as one of the most popular terms in the political world, has been discussed, showing it as an outcome of distinctive social, cultural, and political contexts as is almost every political phenomenon. Although populism does not have a certain form that perfectly fits any time or space, populism and populist notions are extending their time and space in their specific context, particularly in the last two decades. While national and global crises sustained and fed populist discourse, populist parties appeared all around the world.

The success of populist parties established a new channel to supply the ordinary people's demand. As a result, populist or not many political parties have been showing populist notions and attitudes. This thesis began with conducting a broad analysis of populism. Although, as it mentioned above, there is not a single definition of populism, many scholars and scientists have consensus on some specific notions and features of populism. This thesis has focused on three main approaches of populism, respectively: populism as an ideology, discourse and style.

Populist parties have been spreading all around the world, particularly and very obviously on the European continent. There are not only populist opposition parties but also populist governments in Europe. The AfD in Germany has been extending its political power and has become the strongest opposition party in the federal assembly (Bundestag) in a very short time. As this thesis highlighted and many studies concluded, the AfD has populist and nativist motivation. Therefore, the thesis has analyzed the populist anatomy of the AfD in order to define the AfD's

standing point on the populism spectrum. Regarding populist notions of the AfD, this thesis conceptualized the specific rhetoric using the discourse analysis method.

It has been discussed in depth that populist logic has been instrumentalizing dichotomization of society or dichotomized societies. Also, populist ideology intensifies and cements the idea of pure and not-disoriented people. Furthermore, populism is considered a synonym of the anti-establishment and anti-elites. Populist parties, including the AfD, conceptualize and instrumentalize these separated groups as a tool in order to attract their supporters and increase their political power. Separating society into two groups is the core strategy of the populist parties, including framing elites, minorities, and foreigners as the reason for all problems. That feature of populist ideology leads to another common behavior of populist parties, which is scapegoating. The main success behind populist parties including the AfD is having a simple, clear-cut explanation for all problems and framing foreigners and particularly elites as the main responsible agents. The AfD has been empowering its eurosceptic ideology with framing 'the failure' of the European Union during all crises.

The COVID-19 crisis has had an atomic impact on world politics. It has gone far beyond the health crisis. The world trade and production has been significantly damaged by the pandemic. And there has been a curiosity of how governments and particularly populist parties would perceive the crisis. Therefore, this thesis conducted a very detailed discourse analysis of the AfD during the COVID-19 crisis in order to have a proper explanation on how COVID-19 has been instrumentalized in the political sphere in order to scapegoat national and European elites.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, populist ideology has absorbed the crisis to reproduce its own rhetoric. Populist parties argue that 'corrupt elites' do not consider the 'will of the real people', and they are mainly responsible for such a crisis due to the border regimes and migration policies. Therefore, anti-elitist and eurosceptic rhetoric has boomed again during the COVID-19 outbreaks in Europe. For example, since the first COVID-19 case in Hungary, Orban blamed foreigners

and migrants for bringing the pandemic in Hungary. Orban's anti-migration discourse has been empowered by conceptualization of COVID-19 fear and blaming foreigners and migrations as 'scapegoats'. His scapegoating rhetoric is not limited with anti-migration but also European elites who are easing the asylum seeker process.

Also Poland's prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki of the Law and Justice party is another European member states' leader instrumentalized pandemic to create 'fear' in order to advance their political agenda under the cover of tackling the pandemic. He criticized the European Union, arguing that European Union has not contributed any financial support to fight back to the coronavirus crisis. He also turned to wearing 'national lenses' to blame elites, arguing that elites are only thinking about their own interest and power rather than individuals.

Conducting a content analysis on the AfD's performance during the pandemic was the key precondition in order to test the main argument of this thesis. Therefore this thesis was started with looking at the social media performance of the party and then analysing COVID-19 strategies. In this process, the AfD resembles the logic of a 'business model'. The party has packaged shock and confusion in populist discourse and presented it to society again. In other words, the party meets the 'need for explanatory demand' in the society with the supply which the party set up using its own discourses. The party then presents it to the society, especially through the channel of social media tools. Therefore, in order to test the core statements of this thesis, it is important to deeply analyse the AfD's official statements, leader's social media posts and tweets from the first day that COVID-19 appeared in Germany to the second week of May. These have been analysed using discursive methodology and content analysis. All official statements and social media posts during the pandemic have been critically analysed and collected in the Appendix (see Appendix A).

Social media is the main weapon that the AfD uses to achieve its political agenda and general purpose. In order to understand the difficulties that the AfD has gotten

into, the nature of populist parties and how they increase their popularity should be considered. The AfD's social media effort has been envied by many political parties. However, apparently, the AfD has been losing its dominant channel to reach its supporters. Obviously, its social media channels are still there and exist. However, during the crisis, either the AfD is not seen as main information resources, people have been more into state-owned sources of information or populist rhetoric has not been strong/interesting enough to attract 'the people' -at least since the beginning of the crisis. That statement can be supported by surveys which point out that the popularity of AfD has been falling. For instance, as it has been mentioned above, according to Infratest dimap's survey, since the COVID-19 crisis in Germany, the Union (Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU)) has increased its political support, while for the AfD it has decreased.

This thesis analysed that there have been some internal and external challenges behind the weakened situation of the party. First of all, in the first month of coronavirus in Germany, the AfD did not really pay attention to the crisis. AfD officials mentioned the Corona crisis around five times in the entire month of February. Also, a significant development related to external challenges was the Hannau attack on 19 February. There, 11 people lost their lives in a far-right racist attack in Hanau. Far-right terrorists targeted two shisha bars and shot around. The manifesto which was written by the perpetrator of the attack contained anti-migrant rhetoric that echoed and was associated with AfD sentiments. As a result, the AfD found itself under observation by the federal government.

Additionally, another very significant event took place on 20th of March. There was Dissolvment of Flügel (the Wing) from the AfD. The far-right faction within the AfD was declared and recognized as 'extreme' by the chief of Germany's domestic intelligence agency (BfV). It also mentioned that the extreme-right is the most dangerous threat to German democracy. Furthermore, AfD's Brandenburg state leader Andreas Kalbitz has been expelled from the party. After his expulsion the AfD's Thuringen state and the Wing leader Locke backed Kalbits. While AfD

parliamentary group leaders Alice Wiedel and Alexander Gaulan voted against Kalbitz's expulsion, that act has been seen as split in the party which eastern against western delegates. That internal challenges impacted AfD's focus and orientation towards the COVID-19 crisis.

Another significant finding of the thesis is that although the AfD seemed silent in the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, contrary to what is usual, it did not take a radical anti-position, struggled to formulate a coherent stance on the pandemic, including internal and external challenges, the party succeed to be associated with anti-coronavirus measurements and an anti-lockdown movement.

For example, the party representatives claim that lockdown was completely unnecessary. And the government initially overslept to react in good time. The AfD somehow determined its standing point on the pandemic and against the federal government. The AfD's spokesperson claimed several times that the measures were exaggerated and the federal government has been trying to cover up their own failures. Even Chancellor Angela Merkel has been described as "chancellor dictator" by the party due to the 'restrictions on the individual right'.

Furthermore, as it has been discussed in the populism chapter, populist parties are likely to combine crises and scapegoat the foreigners or elites for all woes. The AfD has tried to link the corona crisis with its core issue of migration and islamophobia. For instance, the local representatives of the AfD tried to play off Christians against Muslims in Thuringia. The right-wing people pointed out that it was not possible to celebrate Easter, but "on time" two weeks later of the beginning of Ramadan, services are allowed again (Appendix A, 53).

The AfD also conceptualized the coronavirus crisis in order to increase eurosceptic ideas among people. The party representatives have blamed European Union policies as the fundamental reason for the crisis, also the AfD has addressed old crisis management of the European Union as the main failure of the crisis. In other words, the European Union has been portrayed as a source of all woes instead of a solution by the AfD.

The thesis aimed to conduct an analysis of if or to what extent AfD's negative portrayal of the European has impact on AfD supporters. Therefore this thesis conducted twelve in-depth interviews with AfD supporters in order to test the AfD's populist discourse of COVID-19. Additionally, this thesis has analyzed the perception of AfD supporters toward national and international elites as a last piece of the puzzle.

An important outcome of the in-depth interviews reflects the core purpose of the thesis: all interviewees agreed that European Union and elites are a failure in dealing with the pandemic. While many of the participants have criticized the European Union's performance, some participants have blamed the European Union as a reason for the entire crisis. This data shows that even though party members may change their perception towards federal government management during crisis, eurosceptic ideology and anti-elite behavior is still active and alive. Therefore, it can be deduced that COVID-19 has not changed the perception of AfD supporters towards European Union and international elites.

Although, there have been some studies and surveys showing that the AfD has lost or has been losing its political power, this thesis argues that the AfD will be stronger than before the crisis. Based on the results from in-depth interviews and social media posts, if the AfD will conceptualize and instrumentalize the pandemic's impact and formulate a coherent stance on the COVID-19 pandemic, becoming a leverage of anti-pandemic measurements and an anti-lockdown movement, this thesis claims that the AfD will get more support day by day. Therefore, further research could explore AfD's position and rhetoric in the aftermath of the pandemic. Also, this study leads to further research on how EU's COVID-19 performance impacted on Euroscepticism.

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## APPANDIX A

### Descriptive Analysis of AfD's Official Websites During Pandemic

1. 12 February: (Notification): Bundestag starts new session which includes current COVID-19 situation.
2. 12 February: (Policy Advice): AfD member of the Bundestag Robby Schlund, member of the health committee, explains: "To prevent the epidemic from spreading, we recommend that the government take additional preventive measures and develop a global health care plan for such disasters (Afdbundestag, 2020).
3. 13 February: (Opposition to Green Party): Greens MP Kordula Schulz-Asche claimed "spreading of fake news, conspiracy theories and racism promote the spread of coronavirus" and stick to what the Robert Koch Institute recommends and do not believe any false messages! (schulz-asche.de, 2020). Then, AfD have trifled it as "Aha, all right" (AfDimBundestag, 2020).
4. 20 February: (Hanau Attack): Alexander Gauland on the attack in Hanau: "I find it shabby to exploit such a terrible act. All we know is that it is a mentally completely confused person." (AfDimBundestag, 2020)
5. 26 February: (Anti-government): Alice Weidel: Germany stumbles helplessly into the corona crisis! Despite the threatening development, the government only appeases and does not act" (AfDimBundestag, 2020).
6. 27 February: (Anti-government): Alice Weidel: "We now need an active crisis prevention instead of rhetorical pills" (AfDimBundestag, 2020).
7. 4 March: (Anti-government) Schielke-Ziesing Pohl: "The coronavirus is no longer just a health crisis. As reported by Deutschlandfunk on March 1st, 2020, the corona crisis is increasingly threatening the German economy" (AfDBundestag, 2020).
8. 9 March: (Anti-Government) (Border) What is Germany doing to ensure the security of its own citizens at the borders? Obviously nothing. Despite hours

of discussion last night by the Merkel cabinet in the Chancellery, no border security measures have become known.

9. 10 March: (Policy Advice): Anyone who has a mild upper respiratory tract illness (e.g. sore throat) or who is reasonably suspected of being infected by contact with infected people or while traveling can make use of it.
10. 10 March: (Anti-government): AfD groups call for better school preparation. (AfDimBundestag, 2020).
11. 11 March: (Anti-government): (border-travel restrictions) Arguing that there should be travel restriction to Italy and/or at least official travel warning to tourists and citizens.
12. 12 March: (Policy Advise) (Family): In this difficult situation, however, parents need this loss of earnings scheme, which is possible for up to six weeks, just as urgently. Let us help parents (Timo Crupalla )
13. 12 March: (Anti-government) (Measurements): Claim that while the number of corona cases in Germany is increasing every hour, the federal government is still unable to act. Also, Weidel claimed that ‘‘the federal government is only interested in ‘specific people’ whom government still can take money from their pockets’’. (AfD Kompakt, 2020)
14. 13 March : (Anti-government) (being not prepared to the pandemic): AfD blamed the federal government due to the being unprepared to such a health crisis. AfD claims that although the federal government has known for years that if such a crisis happens in Germany what would be consequences. Hence, ‘‘Germany is not prepared for a pandemic, nothing has been done!’’. (AfD Kompakt, 2020).
15. 16 March: (Anti-government) (Border Policies): AfD criticized federal government in order to border policies. AfD strongly supports closed borders for security.
16. 16 March: (Anti-Government) (Measurements): Right - but too late!
17. 17 March: (Anti-government) (lack of will): Suggesting corona test and closing all borders and airports. Also, Beatrix von Storch, deputy

chairwoman of the AfD parliamentary group claims that ‘‘Merkel lacks the will to protect citizens’’

18. 18 March: (Anti-refugees): AfD chairman Dr. Christian Wirth argues that federal government can use empty airplanes in order to send back around 250,000 non-asylum seekers into their home countries. He points that ‘‘250,000 people who are obliged to leave Germany are illegal here and put a strain on our social system’’
19. 18 March: (Anti-EU): After the failure at Corona, the EU Commission President should resign. Beatrix von Storch ‘‘It is now so clearly recognizable to everyone that the EU failed in the corona crisis - just as it did in the migration crisis and the euro crisis before. Von der Leyen is now trying to limit the damage - with a confession of her personal failure and the failure of the EU. After completely failing as Minister of Defense, it would now be time for von der Leyen to take action. The Corona crisis also clearly shows that the best crisis management for Germany cannot be in the hands of the EU. Only the nation state - and not the EU - can optimally protect its citizens. ’’
20. 19 March: (Policy Advice): AfD federal spokesman Tino Chrupalla and deputy AfD federal spokeswoman Alice Weidel present a 5-point immediate program.
21. Economic support for families. they must be guaranteed appropriate continued payment of wages for all working parents who now have to look after their children at home for the entire duration of the officially ordered state of emergency.
22. Financial support to self-employed people, freelancers and small and medium-sized businesses are particularly affected by the extensive restrictions on public life resulting from the corona crisis.
23. Rescue package for the tourism industry
24. Fast internet
25. Securing the food supply. The aim is to reduce the dependency on global supply chains in the food supply.

26. 20 March: (Anti-government): sleep in the corona virus crisis wake up in the economic crisis.
27. 21 March: (Anti-government): Corona virus threatens over four million jobs in the tourism industry
28. 21 March: (Cooperation with government): For the good of the country, we of the AfD are putting the political dispute back in this crisis.
29. 22 March: (Anti-EU): No to Green Deal: Instead of sinking tax billions in the course of the Green Deal, the EU must provide the money for European economic stimulus programs against the corona crisis
30. 23 March: (Anti-EU): It is becoming increasingly clear what a small role the EU plays when crisis management is actually necessary. The nation states are currently acting sovereign, fast and self-sufficient, while Brussels can only hear basic statements without contributing anything to aid and security in the member countries.
31. 24 March: (Anti-government): The government is implementing billion-dollar programs, paving the way for large companies through the corona crisis. However, she completely forgets a very important pillar of our economy: the micro-entrepreneurs and solo self-employed.
32. 25 March: (Anti-refugee): Contact ban also for your protection, dear “refugees”!
33. 25 March: (Anti-EU): In the crisis, EU accession negotiations with the Balkan countries are the completely wrong signal. Instead of helping members in the Corona crisis, the EU only wants to continue growing.
34. 25 March: (Anti-government-elites): The abortion lobby never misses an opportunity to undermine the protection of unborn life. If the federal government were to respond to these demands, it would be a fatal signal and presumably the entry into a new pro-abortion policy. This is clearly to be rejected, ”says von Storch.
35. 25 March: (Anti-EU): EU-wide common debt to combat the corona pandemic must be prevented. Corona bonds are therefore to be rejected just

like euro bonds. Neither Corona nor the euro justify that German taxpayers are bled for the debt of the whole EU.

36. 25 March: (Anti-EU): We see that the EU is quite powerless during pandemic. It is the time for the nation-states.
37. 26 March: (Policy-Advice): In the face of the corona pandemic, the AfD Group is calling on the German government to stand up for the lifting of sanctions against Syria as quickly as possible at European Union level. "
38. 31 March: (Anti-migration): EU and federal government should be more careful on border controls.
39. 1 April: (Anti-government): The corona crisis is further evidence of the failure of the Merkel government. AfD claims that Merkel is the only responsible person for all those crises including economic, migration, green energy cost, and coronavirus.
40. 3 April: (Anti-EU): EU Corona Program is burden to Germany! German funds and guarantees should benefit German workers and companies and should not flow into EU programs.
41. 6 April: (Anti-migration): Finally, due to the Corona borders are closed for asylum seekers!
42. 7 April: (Anti-EU): Each EU member state is responsible for its own debts
43. 15 April: (Anti-government): Open shops, restaurants and hotels!
44. 16 April: (Anti-government): Angela Merkel has never acted resolutely in the interests of Germany and will not do so at the end of her political career. We can no longer afford a weak personality in the Chancellery. Merkel must finally take off her hat.
45. 17 April: (Anti-government): why restaurants and churches should remain closed. If people can comply with hygiene and distance rules in the supermarket, at the bakery, at the petrol station
46. 18 April: (Anti-government): Open the restaurants and churches.
47. 19 April: (Anti-EU): "The EU Parliament has apparently learned nothing - neither from the migration crisis nor from the corona pandemic. Instead of pushing for a strict policy of closed borders and remigration, the aim is to

further strengthen the migration magnet by continuing to open the borders to migrants and creating additional incentives for migrating to Europe. This negligently means that the corona virus will spread further. On top of that, the corona pandemic is shamelessly used to implement a multicultural agenda that poses a threat to the prosperity, culture and identity of the countries of Europe.

48. 20 April: (Anti-EU): Against Eurobonds. The corona crisis affects all European countries. It is therefore not a pretext for EU-wide financial struggles with which the EU Commission ultimately continues to disempower the nation states. Each member state is responsible for its own state budget and its own state finances, which is the legal and contractual basis of the EU and the euro. Anyone who exploits the crisis to further erode this principle ultimately destroys both.
49. 21 April: (Anti-government): Lift demonstration ban, restore basic rights  
Why are people allowed to walk together in parks but not to demonstrate together?
50. 23 April: (Anti-government): Why should we wear a mask?
51. 23 April: (Anti-government): Against Coronapp. Corona app only with decentralized data storage
52. 24 April: (Anti-government): Suspicious about protection of mask
53. 24 April: (Islamophobia): Höcke'' It is no coincidence that the easing is now brought forward to the beginning of Ramadan. While the state government had Thuringian fines collected, insofar as these adhered to the Easter traditions, it now creates an obvious exception for Muslims within a very short period of time.
54. 27 April: (Anti-EU/government): Against Green Deal: The economy can only survive the corona crisis without the green deal
55. 29 April: (Anti-government): AfD parliamentary group calls for the shutdown to be lifted immediately
56. 29 April: (Anti-government): government should end 'prescribed ruin' for restaurants & shops

57. 30 April: (Anti-government): If only 5 percent of the 1,650 Corona intensive care beds in Saxony are occupied, there is no reason to massively restrict fundamental rights.
58. 30 April: (Anti-government): Behind it are great real needs of millions of citizens. People who suddenly have much less income, who can no longer finance their lives and can no longer service their loans. Homes are at stake. Family tragedies threaten. The shutdown must be ended as soon as possible. Germany must return to its economic normality while maintaining all hygienic requirements, otherwise we all face an economic and social fiasco of historical dimensions. "
59. 1 May: (Anti-government): Unemployment rate! The corona shutdown brought the austerity and irresponsibility of the federal government to light!
60. 1 May: (Anti-government): This federal government is responsible for the largest post-war recession. The magnitude of the corona crisis is the responsibility of the old parties, who coalition and govern with each other in the federal government and the states.
61. 2 May: (Islamophobia): While AfD welcomed the ban to Mosques but criticised closing of churches.
62. 4 May: (Policy-Advice): Create higher incentives for seasonal workers in German agriculture
63. 5 May: (Against-government): Against immunity card by Health Ministry : The trade 'freedom for data', which the government wants to impose on citizens with the 'immunity card' contradicts the Basic Law.
64. 5 May: (Anti-government): Open KITAS! (Kindergarten)
65. 7 May: (Anti-government)The federal government must do everything to ensure that the children can safely return to daycare centers.
66. 7 May: (Notification): The federal government must also take the IS risk into account in the Corona period with more than 2,000 IS people and around 12,000 Salafists in Germany, the Islamist terrorist threat remains high.

67. 12 May: (Against-government): Freedom of expression and assembly must also apply in times of crisis In a functioning democracy, citizens can take their rejection or unease about the government non-violently onto the streets. It is absolutely right that people exercise their fundamental rights and demonstrate against the corona measures.

## APPENDIX B

### How Active German Political Parties Are on Facebook

| <b>Political Parties</b>                    | <b>Facebook Followers</b> |
|---|---------------------------|
| Alternative for Germany (AfD)               | <b>527,394</b>            |
| Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) | <b>219,116</b>            |
| Die Partie                                  | <b>340,610</b>            |
| Free Democratic Party (FDP)                 | <b>165,959</b>            |
| Free Voters                                 | <b>18,268</b>             |
| Pirate Party Germany (Piraten)              | <b>Not Found</b>          |
| Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)    | <b>211,940</b>            |
| The Greens (Grüne)                          | <b>84,228</b>             |
| The Left (Linke)                            | <b>269,778</b>            |

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

#### Personal Information

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

#### A. Political Participation

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participation in protests, boycotts, strikes)?

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient for discussing politics? Why is it so?

6) Are you a member of groups on facebook or similar platforms where politics are the focus of discussion? (Are there any groups in social media where you are a member to discuss politics)?

7) Which party do you feel close to?

### **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) In general, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic from? From your perspective, which was the most reliable channel?

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most?

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about the COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

13) Who do you think is mainly responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think the COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

18) So, is the international community able to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What should be done?

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in dealing with the COVID-19 Pandemic?

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What was Germany able to do, what could it not do?

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation regarding the future process? What plans do you have? What changes do you think would make you happier?

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **The Interviews**

#### **1-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-1: 37, female, Brandenburg, High School, salesperson, employed

#### **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-1: I am quite interested in politics.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-1: Actually, I would like to discuss politics anywhere but it is not possible because of my friend zone. I am interested in politics but I am not a party

member. I participate in protests if it is really attractive for me in terms of content and location.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-1: I mostly follow politics through internet sources. Google news has an algorithm in terms of web sites that I mostly spend time on, therefore Google news offers me news that I would like to be interested in. Also Tagesschau is a good online newspaper that I follow.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-1: First of all, yes I know Facebook and Twitter. These communication tools are convenient to discuss politics. Although it is not easy to have a proper structure while there are lots of people sharing their ideas, sometimes Twitter and Facebook is the exact place where politics should be discussed. Because, lots of people can be involved in one space and share their ideas.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?**(Are there any groups on social media where you are a member to discuss politics)?**

Interviewee-1: Not as a member but I am mostly involved in Facebook group discussions. For example AfD's Berlin Facebook group.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-1: I feel close to AfD.

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-1: I have been following the news since the end of December. So relatively a lot.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-1: Tagesschau, Kenfm and in general google news. Kenfm is for me the most reliable source because it works with a lot of sources which are traceable. Different experts, different opinions whether unlike tagesschau where since the start of the pandemic the same persons frequently show up.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-1: I have had a Facebook account for a long time, therefore during the coronavirus crisis I used Facebook the most.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-1: As I said that I think the social media platforms use an algorithm. Thus the information i got based on the things I searched before so at the end it was suited to me. I can't say if those informations were precise. However, I can say that the outcome of all the sources together shaped my opinion.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-1: The virus is part of my life now. Everyday I go to work I have to wear a mask, keep distance and if I see somebody I know I have to guess their standpoint on the whole situation so I don't offend them or be too close to them. It's annoying and I want the old times back.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-1: The only responsible one is China. They do not know what to eat!

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-1: The human being is a social creature and gets sick when alone. The federal government is a failure and violates human rights such as freedom of movement and even freedom of going outside with friends.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-1: There is not a success at all.

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-1: As I told you that the federal government failed to deal with the crisis.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-1: No, nobody fulfilled their responsibilities during the crisis. The federal government tried to prevent the impact of the crisis but it led to a social and economic crisis.

18) So, how did the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What was done?

Interviewee-1: To analyse the situation with a clear mind and not to be too super fast with decisions. International communities and institutions only care about the United States or Israel's interests. They act or help when problems touch those countries.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-1: The EU's performance was really bad in terms of managing the coronavirus crisis. The EU could not foresee the physical and psychological impact of the pandemic. Also, forcing people to stay at home is a wrong solution.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-1: I have no idea.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-1: No. They asked nobody. And yes they should take us into account. Us means the people.

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What changes do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-1: For me the future is unsecure society. Everybody is going to be scared to be in a crowded space with no distance. We will treat all each other like a potential sick person. Although I want to travel, since every country changes the laws/regulations I am scared to go out of Germany. To be insecure, to be quarantined or to not have the opportunity to go back home again is my biggest fear. But also I know that coronavirus as a disease isn't the first or the last one.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-1: There is going to be a society with a lot of anxiety. Globalization will destroy many old institutions and the way we used to live. But at the same time, it may bring different opportunities. The only thing that can get better is the attitude

people have about their relatives, friends and in general their loved ones. Maybe they'll appreciate the existence of them.

## **2- Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-2: 35, female, Berlin, art school graduate, unemployment.

### **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-2: I watch the daily news and read newspapers about politics.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-2: I believe that politics are a part of our life. Therefore, I actively do politics anywhere, and I am a party member. It's hard to discuss politics with my co-workers but I enjoy participating in protest. Also, not always, but I go to vote.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?  
**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-2: Although I get some political news and information from my friends, I mostly follow politics via TV channels, and newspapers such as Bild, Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-2: Yes, I know Facebook and Twitter. Sometimes, even I do not care but I face with discrimination about my political view. Therefore, I think these platforms provide a perfect forum where everyone can discuss and share their ideas, without any physical meeting.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?**(Are there any groups in social media where you are a member to discuss politics?)**

Interviewee-2: Yes, we meet in AfD's Facebook group, I am a member of some Facebook groups where I can learn and share my thoughts. But I don't want to name those groups.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-2: In the last election I voted for AfD. If the party keeps its political line, I will keep supporting it.

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-2: Pretty much! I know it is air borne and could be deadly. It came and spread from China. Also, there are some theories that it might be developed in labs.

9) From which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-2: I think there are many online channels that spread fake news. Therefore, die Welt is the best resource to get true information.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-2: I am active in social media, therefore I did use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-2: Yes, I absolutely believe that social media news is more accurate than mass media. Mass media is all fake.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-2: My life has been changing a lot because of coronavirus. I was working in an art gallery but it is closed due to the coronavirus measurements. I do not have a stable salary and I do not know when I will be able to work again. And since everyone is affected by circumstances, people will not buy paintings for a long time.

13) Who do you think is mainly responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-2: First of all, the main responsible one is China, who did not inform the World Health Organization. Also the World Health Organization did not respond on time to the crisis. Furthermore, due to globalization, people are moving every corner of the world and they spread the virus. Basically, the Chinese government, the World Health Organization and globalization are responsible.

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak processes has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-2: Germany is one of the best regarding dealing with the coronavirus. The federal government responded quickly. Health organizations initiated several tests and kept records. Assigning an institution for only COVID-19 related things was a great decision. Merkel was always honest. However, restrictions and measurements are more than needed. Nobody can declare a curfew and close all the shops.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-2: As I mentioned before, the federal government did the best.

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-2: I cannot say it has failed but there were a lot of unnecessary measurements.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-2: Mostly Yes. The federal government should not care so much about international organizations measurements and calls. Even if it is a global crisis. We as Germany should deal with that alone first.

18) So, how did the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What was done?

Interviewee-2: The World Health Organization is useless. Governments have to deal with that fact and act with accordance. The crisis spread so much because we tried to solve everything in the international arena.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-2: I do not think that European Union was successful at all. The EU claims that we are together on everything including pandemic but they left Italy and

Spain alone. They are hypocrites and even they could not prevent mask wars among its member states.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-2: As far as I know Germany took patients from other countries and that is more than enough. Every country is affected and therefore every country should deal with its one problem.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-2: They did not ask me anything and yes people should have a say on the coronavirus crisis. Since we are all affected somehow.

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-2: I do not think that things will be the same again. We will have to change our way of living. Some occupations will lose their importance such as my work. I might have to change the way that I earn my living.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-2: We will get more and more digitized. Digitized society has pros and cons but I do not think it should be this fast. Some governments and even some

companies are collecting enormous data and we do not know what they are going to do with them in the future. Im am pessimistic about the future that this pandemic has been shaping.

### **3-Personal Information**

1)Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-3: 43, Male, Brandenburg, High School, Businessman, Employer

#### **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-3: I am not super into politics. But I follow the news.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-3: I do not talk about politics, I prefer to do politics while there is anonymity. I do not want my political views to affect my business. Therefore I do

not want my employee to discuss politics with customers. I vote, but I am not a party member or participating in strikes.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-3: I daily read newspapers. I mostly read Die Zeit, Berliner Zeitung, Der Tagesspiegel, and Frankfurter Allgemeine.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-3: Yes I know Facebook and Twitter. Once I used Facebook for advertising my company. On Facebook anything is possible but I think Twitter is more convenient for discussing politics. I think Twitter users are more into politics and share personal ideas.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?**(Are there any groups in social media where you are a member to discuss politics?)**

Interviewee-3: I am not a member of any political group. But I think it is totally fine.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-3: I support AfD political views lately.

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-3: Unfortunately I know very well. Information about COVID-19 is everywhere. Also as an employer, I have to follow the news about coronavirus in order to keep my business running.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-3: As I told you that everywhere is full of information about the coronavirus crisis. It started to irritate me. I read the newspaper that I mentioned before. Newspapers are more reliable than internet news. The reason is there is a double check in terms of accuracy.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-3: Yes, I used Facebook mostly. I can not say I am a fan of Twitter.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-3: I support the expression of freedom. Social media tools are providing this right. But it creates such a bubble where all information is mixed. Therefore, I would prefer a printed newspaper.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-3: There has not been a curfew in Brandenburg and Berlin, therefore when I compare myself with other people I can say that I am luckier than many people. However, due to the coronavirus measurements I could not enjoy rituals of my life. Also, my business has been challenging with the crisis. I want my business back as soon as possible.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-3: China and government. China did not control the crisis and it spread to Europe, also when the infection rate increased in Europe, German government did not take measurements quickly.

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-3: I can not say that German government was successful. First of all there were parties and people who called the government out for shutting down the borders, the government did not care.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-3: There is not such a success or successful one.

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-3: As I told you that Merkel is the main responsible one in order to not to protect German citizens, however she failed to fulfill her responsibility.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-3: I think the AfD called and warned the federal states many times due to the coronavirus measurements. However, Merkel and her grand coalition did not listen to the AfD. Therefore except AfD all political parties and politicians did not fulfill their requirements.

18) So, could the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What should be done?

Interviewee-3: What is the international community ? This crisis showed that Germany is alone in such a crisis. International institutions did nothing! They could find the vaccine but they failed so far.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-3: European Union should not intervene in nation states business. The EU failed in the migration crisis once, we should not expect anything from the EU during the crisis.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-3: Why should we help other countries while we are in such a need or dealing with the crisis ?

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-3: I do not think that I could be asked but the federal government should have thought about the consequences that I have.

## **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-3: I wanted to expand my business but because of coronavirus, it seems like it will take so much time. I need my old business back, then I can be happy again.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-3: Everyone has seen that the federal government could not control the crisis. I think Merkel should rest! It's time for more sharp parties like the AfD. And AfD offers a national economy which we need more. Also we should decrease dependency to the other states.

## **4-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-4: 42, Male, Berlin, Abitur, Public Transport,

## **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-4: In Early times I was not so interested, but actually I'm forced to be interested, because the situation really disturbs me. So that's why I'm also very active in social media forums.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-4: Well, social media is a really good platform, for discussions and getting the new, latest information. I started to vote again, (since 10 years ago), I am not a member in a party, however I am well informed. Yes, that is my way of communicating and getting my voice heard loud! Moreover it is very effective, because we need not to speak with the media, that is our message. We do not trust them!

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-4: I do not read newspapers, except social media, that is my newspaper, and I also follow some youtube channels.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-4: Yes, absolutely! It's fast and you can talk with everyone. Everyone has the right view on some topic. We are not sponsored by some companies.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?(**Are there any groups in social media that you are a member to discuss politics?**)

Interviewee-4: Yes, there are many groups, not every right value party is a bad party, btw.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-4: In early times, I supported CDU but nowadays AFD! They are speaking the right words and moreover they are asking the right questions.

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-4: In my point of view, I'm well informed. I've got my sources which are reliable.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-4: Youtube and Facebook, are my sources. Because, on these platforms, nobody has to be anxious. Everybody feels safe. I've made new friends which are the positive side effects.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-4: Of course! I've got no trust in the classic media company, these are tools for Miss Merkel. As far as I am concerned, I prefer Facebook. It is easy, fast and you are not alone. Well, I started to use them 10 years ago.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-4: well, Youtube is my source, second is Facebook. These platforms are from human beings for human beings!

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private or business life?

Interviewee-4: It opened my eyes to reality! Look, all the foreigners. they all are buying in huge packages, and what about us? Germans? All the old people? They can not buy so much. they can not carry so much. But the foreigners, they are living with 5 or more people in a flat, and all of them buy for themselves. What about us ?

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-4: it is a good question. Better question is: for whom is this COVID-19 good?

Let me explain it; for all the companies and for all the foreigners.

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-4: We were too late with all our rules! Why did we allow all the foreigners in our country? Our Merkel has made many mistakes! We should protect ourselves first! I'm not so sure, if Germany has managed it well. Yes, after we forced them to hear more about our real problems, we made the right steps.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-4: AFD, was the tipping point! We woke up the people, we managed to provide the right parameters!

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-4: CDU!

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-4: Absolutely not! Now it's a little bit better, but who is responsible for this result? We! And we have to be careful with the new rules! We have to protect our rights and moreover we have to protect the German people first!

18) So, did the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What was done?

Interviewee-4: We have to clarify the priorities! We should be careful with our borders! All the problems are not done in Germany yet.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-4: Bad, absolutely bad! I don't believe in the European Idea! Where was the EU? Every member state started to protect itself! Didn't it?

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-4: We should be prepared for such pandemics, and that means; first German and then we could help the other countries.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-4: I'm feeling that we were forgotten. But this is a fact, which has existed for a long time. We are the victims, we were not responsible for this problem. And all the money and the help including KfW Kredit is paid for all the foreign companies, gastronomies, and all the wrong people. I didn't get any help!! I had to work and I am not protected.

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-4: We need a change in Germany and in our mindset! We need new rules for all the problems and all the causes. I'm thinking about being a member of the AfD, because together we can reach more results. But together means; being in the right party and with the right people!

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-4: I think, we will be stronger with AfD and we will get more members in AfD soon. We will have problems with all the new regulations and with all the foreigners. It's time to change the game and the rules!

### **5-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-5: 37, Male, Berlin, Bachelor degree, Human Resources, employed

### **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-5: I randomly follow news on social media

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-5: I do nothing serious about politics besides following news and sharing some posts in different social media channels.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?  
**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-5: I read all German newspapers but online

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-5: Social media is where we talk politics, and we can find people who think like us and who think differently.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?**(Are there any groups in social media that you are a member to discuss politics?)**

Interviewee-5: Yes, there are many political groups that I am member of and there are many that I m reporting them because I don't like their perspectives.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-5: More AFD but sometimes I'm angry at them too

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-5: I know that it is coming from China and killing people, it even may be a plan of China to kill all of us.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-5: I mostly get information through TV and social media.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-5: Facebook, Twitter and newspaper website

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-5: Twitter is great because everything is very fast, in mainstream media everything takes time and government doesn't share real issues as they are

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-5: COVID-19 changed a lot of things in my life, I can't go out, can't go to work, feeling angry and also fear as well. This virus makes me feel weak and it looks like it will never end

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-5: Of course China

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-5: No, Germany is not good at that. On TV Merkel says Germany does great but it's all lies. Many people are dying but it doesn't show it. Merkel is not fulfilling her job and she should resign immediately.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-5: It is not successful when many people died

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-5: It is Merkel's and Grüne/Greens and Die Linke/Left party's fault.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-5: Some AFD politicians are brave enough to be honest otherwise they all are fake.

18) So, did the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What was done?

Interviewee-5: Honestly, I don't know that

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-5: EU did horrible, all because of foreigners, many of us died so the EU will not survive after that.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-5: Germany has a lot of power but the government doesn't work efficiently.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-5: Nobody asked for my opinion and yes, it's my country they should have asked me as well.

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-5: I will support my party even more because only AFD is telling the truth and with the virus unfortunately I have to be careful otherwise when China and US want to kill us so we even should be stronger than before.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-5: Everyone saw China and USA's real face so globalization will no longer hold any hopes as it never existed.

#### **6-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-6: 39, male, Berlin, bachelor's degree, consultant, self-employed

### **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-6: Very interested, because I believe it is the duty of a citizen to participate in political opinion formation.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-6: Often discussing political topics on social media, especially Facebook. Face to face discussions take place more rarely, lately. But sometimes topics arise in daily conversations with friends, then I also say what I think and speak about my political opinion. Of course, I go voting. I even had a party membership but resigned and left the party some years ago already. I do not work for any political campaigns, but I do get engaged sometimes for NGO topics and their lobbying campaigns, if this counts. I do not think that protests or boycotts truly help, as they get often unheard and twisted by mainstream media. Unfortunately, the influence of the media is very big and even though journalists should report independently, they are somewhat bound to their chief editors / publishing house.

“Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.”, seems to be the motto of many journalists these days.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-6: Sometimes newspapers, oftentimes the daily news and especially social media, mainly facebook and forums.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-6: Yes, I am using both Facebook and Twitter. Especially Facebook liberalised the whole “opinion landscape” in Germany. I believe Facebook helped, so everyone can express his opinion nowadays.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?**(Are there any groups in social media where you are a member to discuss politics?)**

Interviewee-6: Yes, but I do not want to say which groups

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-6: AfD

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-6: Not enough, probably. Clearly the government and the media is not telling us the truth. So it's upon each and every citizen to search for the right information. Fortunately there is a lot in social media that can be found. And some of it is really shocking. It seems the deep state is influencing us everywhere.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-6: TV, some online media, radio and especially Facebook; but the articles on Facebook seemed to provide the most valuable and trustworthy information. It makes you think edgy! And this is what we need. If we go with the masses we die.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-6: Yes, as said, Facebook is my source.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-6: I believe the articles on Facebook provided the most accurate information. It's a good mixture of various points of views.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-6: Well, it's difficult to keep up these days. Many of my clients are struggling and I also lost clients in this phase. The government is helping with some money, but this is not enough. They spend too much on useless things, like the whole refugee problem, instead of focusing on what is truly important.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-6: I am sure in a few years they will surprisingly find out that it was – against all odds – truly coming from a laboratory. I can imagine it's even a thing done by the US to start a war with China. They have their fingers in everything and I would not wonder if they actually started this whole pandemic.

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-6: I think it's simply not as bad in Germany as in other countries. Merkel and her gang simply do what they want and try to keep power, instead of listening to all the protests of people seeking their freedom. These lockdowns did no good for our country, instead Merkel pushed us back to the economy after the war. And they even say that! It's crazy! So Germany did not succeed in anything in this regard.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-6: it was not successful

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-6: Merkel and 'her gang' they simply don't have a clue what is really going on and just try something. The idea to lockdown everything did not really help. We should have stayed open. And all these bullshit masks. First they say masks are useless, then they say everyone should wear a mask – how stupid! They simply don't know what to do and instead of focusing on the German people they invest millions in bullshit programs.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-6: Requirements? What requirements? This whole Corona thing is like any flu that kills ten thousands of people every year.

18) So, could the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What should be done?

Interviewee-6: I am not a doctor. I don't know. But a lockdown seems not to work. We were just lucky in Germany.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-6: They didn't do anything. Communications ZERO! No information at all and I did not get any support from any EU institution. Instead, the WHO is backing up China or whoever is responsible for this.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-6: No. I don't know about such details. They should do what some doctors say and finally accept the Heinsberg statistics.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-6: I have my freedom. The government is clearly locking us up and taking our freedom but because of this Corona stuff, nobody should be locked away as if we are living in a cage.

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-6: I really think that a change in the government is needed. We need new leaders that truly do what they say and don't lie to us. We do need leaders that are not afraid of some weak counterparts in other countries. And I really hope that Brexit is a lesson for the EU fanatics. I would be super happy, if Merkel finally leaves her desk and somebody competent steps up to clean up this mess.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-6: I don't know. But I hope Corona will teach the Germans and the EU that we can not help everyone from other countries, all these migrants coming to the EU. We can not help everyone while not caring about our own stuff. We can only help them, when we have enough money to help and support.

#### **7-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-7: 23, male, Frankfurt (Oder), University, student

### **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-7: -Due to my studies and future plans I can say I am into politics.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-7: I am actively doing politics anywhere. I am participating in strikes and protests. And I am a party member.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-7: I don't want to name my resources.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-7: -Yes, I am aware but because of information pollution I do not use them

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?(**Are there any groups in social media where you are a member to discuss politics?**)

Interviewee-7: I prefer reading articles as well as scientific research instead of your social networks and I am not part of any social media tool.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-7: I feel close to AfD

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-7: -I am super aware of it. As a foreigner do you think you are?

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-7: Every channel where Merkel does not speak that much.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-7: As I mentioned that I don't trust social media tools

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-7: I follow only AFD pages. I think the most accurate information is there.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-7: Germany is a strong country but I do not want us to share our resources with any other country everything could be easier but because of wrong decisions we are suffering now.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-7: I do not know who is the Responsible person or country in the world but for Germany I can sincerely point out Merkel for her management!

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-7: 100 percent not! We see and live with her management

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-7: There is not such a leader that I can call successful in a power position.

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-7: Merkel! Wrong migration policies, late precautions, wrong decisions and here we are.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-7: No! And can you tell me why is it so interesting for you?

18) So, did the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What was done?

Interviewee-7: No answer.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-7: We are good enough to cover up our problems and bring new solutions. Every country is responsible for their own actions. We do not need the EU.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-7: What did Turkey do? This is where you are from right?

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-7: No answer.

## **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-7: The federal government is responsible for the current situation. First step is removing them all and placing real politicians who can make clear and healthy decisions.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-7: World is getting crazy and even our land is economically damaged. I cannot predict what might happen.

## **8-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-8: 25, Male, Berlin, Master Degree, Data Analyst, student-employed

## **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-8: I am very interested in politics and I am not an active member of a political party in Germany. If I would choose, I would have been with Afd to participate in political activities. I do follow regularly political news

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-8: Generally, I do like to talk about politics with my friends. We are discussing the current government and issues, migration problems, generally the economy and recently the coronavirus crisis that we are facing.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-8: I do follow mostly on social media since I do not have enough time to follow on newspapers and any tv channel. I am following those channels on Twitter. Moreover, I do follow Afd Politicians and some deputies from the government.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-8: Yes, I am actively using these channels. I like face to face discussions. Because of my political view people are only abusing and talking nonsense about politics and other current issues. No one is reading AfD's mission carefully. Especially people who think that they are open for all aspects of societies. I see that publicly accessible discussion groups in social media are mostly wasting time cause no one respects you and acting like we are against humanity but in reality

we are patriots of Germany. I believe that we love our country and other people more than those people who welcome any people in our country!

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?(**Are there any groups in social media that you are a member to discuss politics?**)

Interviewee-8: No, as I mentioned above, I am not following any group of them

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-8: AfD

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-8: As a German, I believe that still we are not doing well and we are not well informed by the government. I could say that Robert Koch Institute is trying to explain the situation but I think that Merkel and her supporters control the data and they do some manipulation.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-8: I do follow Twitter and the official websites of Germany.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-8: Twitter

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-8: I am using Twitter . It is easy to follow politicians and newspapers. There are some issues that bother me that political parties especially CDU tries to calm the society by hiding the reality from us. Mostly we see tweets that support the actions that Merkel and the cabinet have been taken. I think that we have unclear regulations and no one knows what to do.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-8: Since I am working in an IT company we can keep working at home. To be honest nothing has been changed for me. I could work remotely even before the pandemic. In terms of private life I feel like I am stuck in a cage and can't go out. But the best thing is that I can spend more time with my girlfriend at home.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-8: China and the people from Italy. From the beginning they should have closed the borders and put heavy restrictions. However, I also believe that our government is also scared to take actions!! They should have closed the borders earlier. We do pay a lot of taxes. We could be enough in our country for sometime. We cannot even use our money for ourselves. Tourists and illegal migrants brought the coronavirus!

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-8: As we know that Germany is doing substantial amounts of tests but still they are not well enough. While the Pandemic spread everywhere, they did not take any effective measurements !! But generally we are on the way to success recently and life is normalizing here when I compare with other EU countries

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-8: Of course our people! We stayed at home and didn't travel for nothing.

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-8: EU is basically man failure in corona crisis as all crisis

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-8: In terms of solidarity all politicians worked together. They could have been more efficient but still they did well.

18) So, could the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What should be done?

Interviewee-8: I do not know what but they had to come up with an idea to solve this crisis.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-8: It is a global pandemic and all countries have the same problem. The EU did fail because of their health and economy systems. Germany had better health and economy, so recovering would be easier for us.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-8: Germany is already doing a lot! They brought lots of patients from Italy, Spain or so. They need to take care of their people first as all countries are doing.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-8: Federal government does not care about people's opinion.

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-8: Future will be better for Germans. We are investing and saving a lot instead of wasting money. I am planning to set up my own company on IT that provides better solutions for Manufacturing. I would be happier that the borders could remain closed 3 4 months more. And never open to refugees.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-8: We can produce our own products and it makes us better in the economy in the world. Being dependent on other countries only makes us slow.

## **9-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-9: 35, Female, Cottbus, Abitur (High School), customer service, employed

### **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-9: I am largely interested in the politics of Germany.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-9: I have been voting for AfD. I discuss politics in real life mostly and protesting unfair policies and decisions which I think dangerous for my country.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-9: I mainly used the online media because I am not a fan of newspapers. However, I do not decide which newspapers or sources to look at.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-9: Yes, I know those communication platforms. I like to represent my opinion on social networks. I think that a person's profile on social networks should be authentic and reflect people. So I find it appropriate to take part in online discussions, because I feel that I would be discussing with the people personally.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?(**Are there any groups in social media that you are a member to discuss politics?**)

Interviewee-9: Yes, but I don't want to name them

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-9: I support AfD.

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-9: I'm probably less familiar with it than the average person

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-9: Since COVID-19 started I tried to avoid following it. I thought it was not deadly and would not spread all around the world. However when it came over Germany, I started to follow but I cannot distinguish which media is the most reliable. However, I keep an eye on the daily news regarding the pandemic.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-9: I mainly use Facebook. I think it is easy to use it or I just get used to it.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-9: There are of course thousands of different opinions from several people in the mentioned social networks. That's why I'm not a fan of letting my opinion be influenced by individuals who are also unfamiliar with the topic.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-9: The pandemic hit me very hard at first. Since I am a relatively social person who likes to be in societies, the pandemic has had a major impact on my life. However, I have to admit that I still cannot believe today that such a virus makes such waves. I find the mask regulation extremely useful, since it is a relatively minimal restriction, the consequences of which will be very positive. Although I missed my working place, I have been working from home office for the last 2 months and it's totally fine.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-9: When I first heard about this virus in Wuhan, I thought it was a small virus that will go away soon. When it started to spread internationally I started to have concerns about that. At first I believed for a long time that the virus would be something that the US created in labs. Over time, however, I realized that it is something purely biological, whose responsibility for the outbreak has no state power, since powerful states such as the USA, Russia, China, etc. were also deeply affected by the pandemic. However, those who underestimated the virus and reacted too late are responsible for the spread.

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-9: Germany now has a very good grip on the pandemic. With regard to the encroachments on fundamental rights, which include take place disproportionately in Turkey, I think the actions of the German state are great. However, I think that although I am a very social person, public meeting points such as outdoor pools, bars, clubs etc. should remain closed until the end of summer to rule out a potential second wave.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-9: The solidarity of the people!

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-9: I don't think that it failed. We did a great job.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-9: By now the whole world should have noticed that this is a historic event that should not be underestimated. Since, as already mentioned, I am not very familiar with the topic, I can say that Germany fulfills the necessary requirements.

18) So, did the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What was done?

Interviewee-9: Every country should close its borders.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-9: Unfortunately, I do not have a proper answer for this question. However, in this respect I also believe that the EU should ensure that the borders of each country remain closed.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-9: Germany does not have to help any country. First, every country should take care of itself. Aid to other countries should only be considered if we are adequately supplied.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-9: Yes, the opinion of the people was taken into account. Otherwise, the state could have introduced a massive shutdown similar to that in Turkey, whose interference with fundamental rights would not be proportionate. As Germans, we attach great importance to the fundamental right of citizens. With this in mind, our state did the right thing.

## **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-9: When officially the pandemic overs, I would like to travel first. Probably to the beach.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-9: The whole world will pay sufficient attention to the fundamental hygiene rules for at least 100 years. The corona pandemic was / is a hard lesson for humanity. Looking ahead, I think that the people have learned a lot from this pandemic and hopefully, social interaction and the importance of the idea of a strong nation state is understood by everyone.

## **10-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-10: 64, Male, Berlin, Gymnasium, technician, retired

## **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-10: When I was I used to interested in politics. I was active in protests till my mid 30s. Afterwards I did not pay attention to politics so much, I was thinking all parties are almost the same and we as all Germany were doing not bad. However, in 2015, Chancellor Merkel and her ‘smarty pants’ team decided to ‘sell’ Germany to foreigners. Then I decided to vote again and protest.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-10: Since 2015, I have been actively working in my party’s political campaign and supporting it on every stage. I have some friends with whom I can discuss politics. Also I have met with some local representatives of the party and have good relations with them. Also I vote during local and federal elections, including European Parliament.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-10: I watch daily news on TV and also read newspapers. I regularly read the Bild, Die Welt, and sometimes Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-10: I know Facebook, I have an account but I am not really active there. That's why I cannot say if it's convenient or not. But I associate politics with street activities. I mean when I do not like a policy, for me fighting back is protesting on streets not online.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?(**Are there any groups in social media where you are a member to discuss politics?**)

Interviewee-10: I am a member of Facebook but not a specific group.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-10: Since 2015 I feel more close to AfD. Because only AfD cares about the real Germans and Germany.

### **C. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-10: I think I know fair enough. Every news story is only about coronavirus.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-10: I watch TV channels and read newspapers. I think the newspapers that I read are reliable so far.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-10: Yes, but not often. I cannot say that Facebook is my resource. I do not have Twitter. I am also not familiar with internet sources.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-10: I do not trust social media sources. Everyone writes unrelated things. I do not understand how people find information there.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-10: It would not be right if I say COVID-19 changed my life dramatically but of course there are some things that changed. I mostly spend my time in my apartment and with my neighbor therefore, except for social distancing everything is alright. For example, when I go to the supermarket, there are so many people and it's hard to find real needs. Because people are scared like babies. They have not experienced real hunger.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-10: China and Chinese people are responsible. But also the federal government is responsible in order to not to close our borders in time.

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-10: When I compare with other states I can say that Germany did better than other countries. The federal government was not well prepared but they managed somehow. However we would do better if the federal government closed borders earlier.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-10: Our people and health system are behind success.

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-10: It would not be fair to call it failed but the federal government might have managed way better.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-10: Somehow yes.

18) So, did the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What was done?

Interviewee-10: I do not trust the international community. Germany is stronger without such organizations. We do not need help from international communities.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-10: Thank you for reminding. Failure is the European Union. Thanks to the coronavirus crisis we again witnessed fakeness of the EU. Those elite are worthless.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-10: Why should we help other countries when we are still dealing with the coronavirus in Germany? We have no obligation to support others.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-10: I was not asked but I don't feel that I was excluded as well.

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-10: I do not have so many expectations for the future. But I would be happy If I saw the real Germans who are fighting for Germany. Because of Merkel we turn deeply dependent on foreigners, and we need Germans to deal with all problems as we used to do.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-10: I hope the Germans realized the real face of European Union. And as Britain did lately we will follow and exit from the European Union.

#### **11-Personal Information**

1)Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status
- 33, female, Frankfurt/Oder, High School graduate, Sales clerk, employed

## **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-11: I am not interested in politics that much but I try to have general knowledge about what's going on in Germany and the world.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes?)

Interviewee-11: I vote in every election except the European Parliament elections. National elections represent people's opinion but there is no point participating in EP elections because they don't represent the people, they are a bunch of bureaucrats.

I talk about politics with my immediate vicinity occasionally. We discuss the agenda.

I haven't participated in any protest or boycott but I might if there is something that affects my way of living.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-11: Mostly, Bild, Die Welt and Frankfurter Allgemeine. I also follow Twitter and Facebook feeds.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-11: Yes. Those media tools provide a platform to discuss politics. Different people with different opinions can get together and share. But sometimes it is difficult to maintain a conversation because some people don't listen to each other, they just want to tell their opinion. But it is good to have these platforms to discuss politics.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?**(Are there any groups in social media where you are a member to discuss politics?)**

Interviewee-11: Yes I am a member of several groups but I just follow them, not participate in the discussions.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-11: The AfD. I was a CDU supporter but AfD represents my opinion better.

#### **D. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-11: I know enough to protect myself. I wear a mask when I am outside. I have to wear it while working anyway. I try not to contact old people. My parents are in the risk group so I don't visit them because I am working and contacting lots of people everyday. I don't want them to get sick.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-11: I mostly read Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Bild and Die Zeit. But usually I don't have time to follow them all so I mainly read Bild.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-11: Mostly Twitter. Because its news feed is easier to follow and get information.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-11: Yes. Especially on Twitter we can follow lots of doctors' profiles and get information first hand. Mass media usually interprets the news but a doctor's profile says more than the mass media. Also, there is always a risk with the mass media, they might change some information or hide them from the people to prevent chaos. I mean the government might interrupt.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-11: It changed a lot. I couldn't work for a while because everywhere was closed. I am working now but I have to wear a mask and gloves. I know these restrictions are imposed to protect people but they affect our way of working and making everything much more difficult. I am happy that I didn't lose my job but nothing is the same.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-11: I think China and the WHO is responsible. Because China didn't inform the world in time and didn't close its borders. I mean it came from China and they could have prevented it. And the WHO was late to declare it as an epidemic and then pandemic. They didn't inform the other countries. Also, lots of national governments couldn't dare to close the borders in time. I think Germany should have closed the borders much earlier. In short, all governments and the international organizations didn't do what they were responsible for.

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-11: Even though Germany is one of the best countries dealing with covid-19, as I said, the government was late to respond. We should have closed the borders when we first hear about the virus. I think the borders were too transparent anyway. That's why this virus spread this much. If there were more border restrictions, people couldn't travel and this virus might have affected only a small part of the world.

Other than that, the government promised that nobody will lose their jobs. This was a good move because as far as I know, lots of governments couldn't do this. Anyway, there are people who lost their jobs even in Germany. Some of them are the ones who work illegally, I mean without a contract or something and I think they deserve it in some way. They are mostly ones who came from other countries and stayed here somehow. Now they are unemployed and there is nobody to protect them. I mean if you come from another country and don't obey the rules, it's your loss.

Also, the restrictions and closing the businesses were too much. It affected our economy and our way of living. As I said, if we have closed our borders in the beginning, we wouldn't be affected this much. So the government was late to respond and they are responsible for all the economic and social problems that we have now.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-11: As I said, they managed well in some way but they were late to respond, we wouldn't have to deal with this if they did their job in the beginning.

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-11: The government obviously. They control everything.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-11: In the beginning, no! But after it affected Germany, they did what they should have done. But it was too late.

18) So, could the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What should be done?

Interviewee-11: Nope! The WHO always said there is nothing to panic about, it's only in China. They couldn't see how it could affect the other countries or they saw it but remained silent until the point that they cannot be silent anymore.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-11: I think it blew up in their face. They were speechless when the virus started to spread all over Europe. They couldn't act. They say they are here to protect people in Europe but they did nothing while all those people in Italy and Spain were dying. And still, they are just watching, not acting!

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-11: Germany doesn't have any obligations to help others. Every country has enough on their plates. In fact, they are responsible for protecting their own citizens. If people are dying in your country, you cannot go and help others until you are safe.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-11: No, of course nobody asked me anything. They never do. And yes, as the citizens, we are affected the most we should have had a say in this.

## **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-11: I don't think things will be the same again. Our way of living will change. We will have an economic recession and it will take some time to go back to normal again. Not just for Germany but for all the world.

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-11: People lost their jobs everywhere in the world and because the world is connected this much, they are all gonna affect each other's economy. We, as Germans, are hardworking people but our economy is dependent on others especially the EU members, so even if we do what we need to do to cope with this situation, others' laziness or unwillingness will affect us. Like what happened in the 2008 economic crisis.

And the world will be more digitized, and it's happening so fast. In the near future, some business will be lost and lots of people will lose their jobs. I mean, it is possible that a robot might take my job.

## **12-Personal Information**

1) Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- age, gender, birthplace, education, occupation, employment status

Interviewee-12: 22, female, Brandenburg, university student, unemployed

## **A. Political Participation**

2) In general, how interested are you in politics?

Interviewee-12: My father is interested in politics so much, so naturally I grew up in an environment where the main topic was always politics. I would say the habit is transferred from my father to me.

3) What do you do about politics?

- Discussion in the immediate vicinity
- Traditional political events (voting, party membership, working for political campaigns)
- Non-traditional political activities (participating in protests, boycotts, strikes)

Interviewee-12: I vote in federal and state elections. I am a member of the young wing of AfD, so I have a platform to discuss politics. Sometimes I gather with my friends and talk about the agenda. A couple of times I met with some of the politicians of AfD. And, once or twice I attended the protests that the party organized.

4) How do you follow politics? Which newspapers do you follow/read?

**(Which channels do you follow politics from? Which newspapers do you follow?)**

Interviewee-12: Local newspapers and some others like Bild and Frankfurter Allgemeine.

5) Are you aware of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter? Do you think these tools are convenient to discuss politics? Why is it so?

Interviewee-12: Of course! I mostly use Facebook and Twitter and these platforms provide a place to discuss and share opinions. And especially on Twitter, people can contact the politicians himself/herself. People can share their opinion with them like by commenting to a post that they shared.

6) Are you a member of groups in facebook or similar where politics is the focus of discussion?(**Are there any groups in social media where you are a member to discuss politics?**)

Interviewee-12: Yes. I am a member of AfD groups on social media platforms and several other groups created by individuals.

7) Which party do you feel close to?

Interviewee-12: The AfD. My father was supporting CDU only because there was no other party to represent our opinion and at the same time manage to enter the Bundestag. I wasn't happy with Merkel's policies.

## **B. Overall Covid-19 Pandemic**

8) Basically, how much do you think you know about COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-12: I know some stuff. It is a deadly virus, people get infected from their mouth or nose. Old or sick people are affected more. And it spread all over the world.

9) Which channels did you get the most information about COVID-19 Pandemic? From your perspective, what was the most reliable channel?

Interviewee-12: I read Bild and Frankfurter A.Z. online. Also get information from social media especially facebook and twitter.

10) Did you use Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media tools in this process? Which ones did you use the most ?

Interviewee-12: Yes, Facebook and Twitter equally I guess. I follow some groups, politicians and journalists.

11) Do you think Facebook, Twitter or other social media tools provided accurate information about COVID-19 Pandemic? Which ones provided more accurate information?

Interviewee-12: Of course, otherwise I wouldn't follow them. I mean there is lots of fake news but if you are careful enough, you can understand the difference. Like I told you, I follow some profiles like politicians' or journalists' and they share information about the pandemic. I don't think those people would lie in their social media accounts.

12) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic change your life? Can you answer by thinking about your private and/or business life?

Interviewee-12: I am a student so I am not affected that much. Of course it affected my university, I attend my classes online but it's not so bad. But I know lots of people who lost their jobs and whose businesses shrank.

For my personal life, of course it changed my life like everybody. I cannot even go to the grocery store without wearing a mask. I attend my classes online. I cannot meet with my friends and go out for a drink. So yeah, it changed a lot.

13) Who do you think is the main responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-12: Of course China and the WHO. They didn't warn the world in time. It might serve a purpose for China but the WHO has an obligation to tell the world that there is a pandemic and they have to explain what the precautions are.

### **C. COVID-19 Pandemic**

14) Overall, when you think about your country, do you think COVID-19 outbreak process has been well managed? Has Germany been successful in dealing with COVID-19? Why did Germany succeed or fail in battling the coronavirus pandemic?

Interviewee-12: It could be better. Of course, Germany is one of the countries that somehow well managed this process. But as I said, the government responded too late. I could have prevented this. I mean we saw that coming and we knew what's going on in China. I have a strong feeling that the government is benefiting from all these restrictions. They can control the people now. They have an excuse to send people to their home and declare a curfew.

And Germany's population is getting old. Some people say they let this virus spread to get rid of the old population because they are a burden to the economy, they don't work, they just consume. So, it makes sense in a way. I mean the government might benefit, I don't say it is right to allow this.

15) If it was successful, who do you think is behind this success?

Interviewee-12: After the virus started to spread, the government did a good job, I cannot deny this. They established a commission to deal with it and Robert Koch Institute has done a great job.

16) If it has failed, who do you think is responsible for this failure?

Interviewee-12: I don't say it is a failure because people acted responsibly. The government made some mistakes but in total it wasn't a failure.

17) Do you think that political power / politicians / government fulfill the requirements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interviewee-12: Not in the beginning. They should have closed the borders much earlier. I mean it doesn't make sense having transparent borders with or without a virus. Every nation has to have borders. The virus first came to Italy, then it spread. If we don't have transparent borders, we would be safe now. This is where the government failed. That's why AfD requests closed borders. CDU or other pro-EU politicians are nothing but a danger to this country.

18) So, did the international community deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? What was done?

Interviewee-12: I don't think so. Except for some communities like Redcross, nobody did anything. The WHO is nothing but a joke. When it was obvious that the virus is deadly and spreads easily, they said there is nothing to worry about, we cannot say it is endemic. And when it was already everywhere in the world they didn't declare a pandemic. So I say the WHO failed on this.

19) How do you think the European Union performed? Has the European Union been successful in COVID-19 Pandemic?

Interviewee-12: There is no difference between the WHO and the EU. They both are a joke. The EU couldn't protect the people, as they claim it is their job to make sure that people are happy and safe in the Union. But people are suffering and dying. Also, they couldn't prevent the 2008 economic crisis and they do nothing to prevent the one which is coming after all this madness is over.

20) Do you think Germany fulfilled its obligations to help other countries? What could Germany do, what did it not?

Interviewee-12: No country has any obligation to another one. No one can expect Germany to help others. We barely deal with our problems. If it is over in Germany and there is no case and the borders are safe, then it is possible to help others. But for now, every country is alone in this.

21) Do you feel that you are asked about the precautions taken by you during the COVID-19 pandemic process? Do you think it should be asked?

Interviewee-12: Nope! They didn't listen to anybody, even the AfD which is the opposition party in Bundestag. AfD has a lot to offer to overcome this but Merkel did what she thinks is right!

#### **D. Future Expectation**

22) What is your expectation about the future process? What plans do you have? What change do you think would make you happier?

Interviewee-12: After some point, especially after the vaccine, it will be back to normal gradually. Yes, our lives are different now, but in 1 or 1,5 years later things will be back to normal. But we have to take a lesson from this. We cannot have

open borders like before. We cannot take anybody to our country. Yeah, it would make me happy and we have to do this of course, not just to make me happy :D

23) What will change in Germany and the World after COVID-19 Pandemic? What will get better and what will get worse?

Interviewee-12: The world will be more digitalized which has pros and cons. We will need more young people to make it work. So we need young politicians. Especially in Germany, the politicians are old. That's why the AfD attaches importance to its youth branch.

## ETİK KURUL ALT KOMİTESİ DEĞERLENDİRME SONUCU

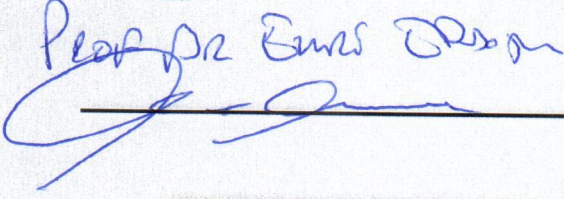
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Proje No: \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_

Değerlendirme Tarihi: 15/05/2020

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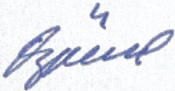
## ETİK KURUL DEĞERLENDİRME SONUCU

Bu bölüm İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulunca doldurulacaktır.

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