**Appendix B: Detailed description of the analyzed pages**

In the following chapters, the ideologies of the pages I investigated are reconstructed in greater detail to illustrate how each Facebook group constructs illegitimate opponents (enemies), legitimate opponents, legitimate allies and illegitimate friends within their discourses. For every page, I will first reconstruct who they portray as opponents, before then presenting who they consider allies.

**Enemies, legitimate opponents, friends, and illegitimate friends within contra-refugee pages**

To understand the dividing lines the Identitäre Bewegung draws between friends and enemies, it is necessary to first grasp the ethnopluralist conception of cultural coexistence at the core of the Identitarian ideology. Ethnopluralists claim to appreciate cultural differences, in a way that mirrors leftwing conceptions of difference democracy (Young 2000), but with one distinct difference: Leftwing multiculturalism argues that cultural differences should be valued and cultural traditions of minority cultures should be preserved to prevent the dissolution of cultural diversity into a universal mainstream culture. Their goal is to integrate different cultures within national communities in a way that fosters respect for differences. Pluralism, in this conception, is internal to societies: People of different backgrounds should live together, coexist peacefully, and work together within the same society.

Ethnopluralism also lays claim to protecting cultures, and includes native and minority cultures in their conception, but instead of arguing for multicultural coexistence, presents cultural separation as a necessity for preserving cultures. In this conception, cultures should be preserved by maintaining homogenous enclaves of national and regional cultures, where members of different cultures are prevented from migrating to other countries, and traditions are preserved through isolation (Spektorowski 2003). The pluralism of ethnopluralist ideologies is external: Differences should not exist within the same society, but only amongst different nations. The conclusions that follow from this ideology are illustrated in one post by the Identitäre Bewegung that discusses the response to the events on New Years Eve 2015 in Cologne and several other major cities in Germany. On this date, during new years celebrations, high numbers of sexual assault and rape allegations, with suspected perpetrators of non-European descent, were reported, leading to a debate on the role that sexism and cultural values of Muslim refugees played in the events. In one post, the IB responds to an interview with Susanne Schröter, a social anthropologist who discussed the role sexist views of refugees played in the attacks, and suggests using education and role-playing courses to teach respect towards women to refugees to avoid such attacks in the future. IB responds:

The Identitarian movement has known for a while: Only those who live a self-conscious, historically rooted life which flows into the German language, who love this country and its development, can be a part of the greater whole.

The approach to now use pedagogy and, like Mrs Schröter, to demand role-playing, to get migrants to unlearn their own ethnocultural identity, is making a fatal error in reasoning. It’s not the behavior of different cultures per se that’s the problem. It only gets problematic if very different cultures are put in relation to each other in the same space. Germans are the people of this country. That’s why the debt to be payed is always with the immigrants. That’s true for normal immigrants and real asylum seekers. Both enjoy the right to be here. And this right can be forfeited – just as Sarah [sic] Wagenknecht recently ascertained.

We know, it’s our country, our rules! (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

In this post, the IB agrees with Schröter’s claim that cultural differences are the cause for sexual violence. But unlike Schröter, IB’s ideology lead them to see these differences as something to be preserved: Instead of teaching respect towards women’s autonomy, IB argues that sexism within Muslim cultures should be valued. Sexual assault is not presented as an immoral act that should universally condemned, but rather a cultural practice that should be preserved within those cultures where it is, according to IB, part of their tradition. Ethnopluralism, in this case, betrays a deep cultural relativism: Whether or not an act is immoral only depends on whether it is part of local culture, and should be preserved only on the basis of whether it conforms to preexisting traditions and a common identity.

The solution, therefore, for IB is to demand the separation of Muslims and Germans, and the exclusion of Muslims from German society. The conflict, for IB, is not one between women’s autonomy versus sexist views, but one of different cultures, and the solution is to spacially separate these cultures.

This leads IB to a very exclusionary vision of society: “Only those who live a self-conscious, historically rooted life which flows into the German language, who love this country and its development, can be a part of the greater whole. “ In this homogenous view of culture, people can only be citizens if they root their life in German traditions and assimilate into a “greater whole”. Everyone else should be excluded. As Spektorowski (2003) has argued, such a vision for society would in effect lead to apartheid states and an “exclusionary national-socialist Europe that will give rise to political and social instability. It will be a permanent nightmare for old immigrants and for political and ideological dissenters.”

The disrespect for political dissent is exemplified in several posts that present existing institutions as illegitimate, as in one post that cites a right-wing editorial from the magazine Sezession:

“We need to be absolutely unforgiving to our attackers. We long past the point of no return. The system is finished and its representatives are out of ideas and scruples.

They deserve our just wrath, yes, hatred. I explicitly do not call for any form of unreasonable violence or other wrong behavior, but for turning this wrath into positive energy for protest.

We can no longer let them lull us and take us for idiots! This disgusting caste of traitors needs to be removed from office and replaced by a true, new people’s democracy. This is only possible if we go, everywhere, in all cities, even the smallest village, on the streets and let our anger out in inflammatory speeches.

We need to demand our right unconditionally. The holy wrath of the righteous will make us strong and unbendable. With swollen breast and hard faces we will stride towards the new Europe. This healing wrath springs forth from the love to our people and our culture. Let us love, let us be furious.“ (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

As this post makes clear, existing liberal democracy is not considered legitimate by IB, but rather as traitorous and unscrupulous. Opponents should be removed from office and replaced by a “true” democracy – indicating that existing democracies are not considered democratic. This “true” conception of democracy is explicitly anti-pluralist – there is no space for liberal moderate conservative or left-wing parties as they exist within liberal democracies, as those opponents are considered traitors that should not be met with forgiveness, but with righteous wrath. Compromise or respect for opposing positions are precluded – ethnopluralists’ demands should be “unconditional”, “unbendable”. In several posts, IB makes clear that anyone opposed to IB’s goals should be considered criminal:

The irresponsible policy of open borders, paired with a naïve, grotesque and at times aggressive humanitarianism, leads Germany into an existential crisis. A cartel of media, politics and the migration lobby tried to use political correctness to conceal the catastrophic effects of mass immigration. (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

Mainstream politics is presented as a conspiracy, and supporters of pro-refugee policies are seen as accomplices of political elites. This is made clear in one post that argues:

 The free pass the government gives to anyone, to come from corresponding crisis countries to Germany, has led to a pull effect and will result in terrorist attacks. The question isn’t if, only when. Then, not only politicians will be responsible, but also those who let themselves be instrumentalized and used for this insane policy of open borders. The blood of the victims will be on their hands. (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

In this post, support for mainstream political parties, pro-refugee policies or NGOs is directly linked to terrorism. Supporters of such policies are not considered autonomous voters who participate in democracy, but as passive agents who “let themselves be instrumentalized”. IB makes clear that opposing views will not be considered legitimate expressions of dissent, but only as a passive act of submission.

As previously argued, the separation of cultures – and the exclusionary policies that would have to be enacted to facilitate it – are presented as a benevolent act that aims to serve the migrants and refugees which IB aims to deport, as in the following post:

We’re not against foreigners, but against replacement. We stand with our homeland and the plurality of people. We value the cultures in the world and want to preserve them!

#Freilassing #Border #IBD | www.identitaere-bewegung.de | #thereplacement (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

In this post, IB presents the false dilemma in which migration is portrayed as “replacement” (in German: “Austausch”), which, in the views of IB destroys cultural differences, and a “preservation” of cultures, which IB argues is only possible through apartheid. The exclusion of migrants and refugees is framed as a benevolent act performed in the interest of “foreigners” themselves. This is combined with the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory that argues that migration is not an expression of the free will of migrants, but instead planned by sinister political elites which aim to destroy cultural diversity:

The new human

In Eastern Europe, politicians seem to recognize the danger behind the centralized policy of the EU und the mass migration promoted by it.

They want to create a new idea of man. A forced-into-line [“gleichgeschaltet”] human monad, consisting of labour drones and consumer subjects, easily controlled, which can no longer criticize authority. Uprooted from their countries and pressed into capitalist exploitation, people are no longer unified by culture or language. They have lost their collective identity and are therefore perfect slaves.

“A ‘migration tsunami’ is rolling towards Europe, according to the Czech politician and former president Vaclav Klaus. ‘The question is whether we want to let our European culture, civilization and way of live be destroyed by hordes of people that come here from other continents’, the 74 year old said according to the newspaper ‚Lidove noviny‘.

He considers the movement of refugees a conspiracy of EU institutions. Immigration supposedly serves to dissolve nation states, to create a new European man of the future.” (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

In this post, IB first presents their own view of the causes of migration, then they approvingly cite a news report that presents similar views expressed by Czech politician Vaclav Klaus. In this view, migration is not caused by autonomous decisions of migrants, or refugees that are expelled from their home, but rather by EU elites who “promote” migration. This conspiracy is portrayed as part of a plan to dissolve people’s capacity for individuality by taking away their cultural identity. Unlike liberal thinkers, who consider autonomy the expression of choice and individual reason, for IB, individuality is identical with reproducing one’s traditions – autonomy is identified with a collective identity, individual choice only exists if it serves one’s cultural identity. For IB, people are individuals if they act according to their culture.

Therefore, for IB individuality is lost if cultures change. Capitalist alienation and exploitation are presented as the result of a loss of tradition, in an argumentative move reminiscent of 20th century fascist ideology (Spektorowski 2003, 113-115): Like left-wing critics, capitalism is presented as dissolving individual choice and autonomy, and IB takes up elements of left-wing critique. But where left-wing anti-capitalism aims to overcome capitalism by fostering individual autonomy or a collective workers’ identity, ethnopluralism instead presents a return to strictly enforced cultural enclaves as the way to overcome capitalism.

Participants within mainstream politics, and opponents to IB positions, are again presented as passive, “gleichgeschaltet”, a term used by Nazi Germany to indicate submission to the Nazi state. IB repeatedly draws on this false dichotomy where people either succumb to German tradition or become passive. This is linked to acts of aggression in one posts that cites another article from the magazine “Sezession” which discusses the sexual assaults on New Years’ Eve in Cologne:

“The culprits have nothing to fear from a German, though – even if they had gone further. The domesticated [German: “verhausschweint”] German, this sissy and moral cripple, rarely hits back. He doesn’t even know how to do that anymore, and even if he was, he’s not willing to assert himself: He lets others walk before him, he subordinates, he yields, he loves backing smaller bread [German idiom]. The fact that none of the North-African attackers were carted away with a broken nose gives us a good guess of what a cowardly figure the German man was in this New Year’s night.

I would bet: If thousands of Germans met up in a public space in Turkey or Arabia to sexually assault women, there would have been – even before the police arrived – dead people. Yes, without a doubt.” (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

In this post, mainstream Germans are presented as domesticated, passive and submissive. The article uses the German word “verhausschweint”, which compares Germans to domesticated pigs, which invokes not just passivity, but also being led to slaughter. Germans are presented as feminized and “crippled”, linking aggression to masculinity and physical health. Therefore, a contrast is made between aggressive men who defend “their” women, and weakness, femininity, passivity and illness. This illness is presented as the result of humanitarian morality – Germans are “moral cripples”, violence is prevented by moral concerns. This view is opposed to “healthy” male violence, with is attributed to Turkish and Arab people: They, supposedly, would kill people if women were attacked.

 This dichotomy of active, aggressive Germans who completely identify with IB’s vision of a homogenous German culture on one hand, and a conspiracy of malevolent political elites and their passive, submissive followers, does not allow for legitimate opponents to IB, in their view. People either agree with IB, or they are passive at best, traitors at worst.

This can also be seen in posts wherein IB constructs political friends. In one post, they cite former supreme court judge DiFabio, who argued that Merkel’s policies in 2015 were unconstitutional, since the admission of refugees would have necessitated a vote in parliament instead of an executive decision – a view that was debated in Germany’s press at the time. IB writes:

 The former supreme court judge and one of the most distinguished intellectuals of this country admonished the chancellor in an expert report that German borders need to be controlled again in cases of doubt. His statements are a sign for a slowly progressing change of opinion within established circles. The concerns about an overstraining of society’s capacity for integration are spreading. Consequences of the Replacement are bringing unrest to everyday politics.

Di Fabio’s thinking is certainly liberal, but he does know of the importance of cultural factors. To him, the West is an original idea, which is accompanied by a market economy and a certain individualist bourgeois culture. These conditions should, normatively, be internalized by immigrants. But during crisis situations, this malfunctions. Even from an established perspective, they are unsure of the peace. (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

Here, DiFabio’s credentials are used to legitimize his opinion and present him as a legitimate actor. At the same time, this legitimacy is directly linked to his agreement with IB’s positions: DiFabio is presented as being correct despite his constitutional liberal views, not because of them, he is “certainly liberal, but”. They stress that “even from an established perspective”, views critical of refugee policy can emerge.

Opponents are hence only granted legitimacy if they support IB’s goals, and only to the degree that they agree with ethnopluralist ideology. As far as allies go, one posts cites a prominent IB activist:

Pierre Aronnax about the necessity to act. Especially now we do not have time for endless debates. It’s time for deeds:

“Our country is going under and now the best opportunities for action have grown, that ever existed for a right-winger in the FRG: Within the metapolitical field there exist a number of magazines, institutions, youth organizations and activist groups (the identitarian movement, the one percent network), and in party politics the AfD. What else do we need to bring the strings to vibrate? The opportunities for action are there. They are looking for people. The time has come for carrying sandbags. National catastrophies can only be stopped through unconditional effort. By everyone. Instead of falling into complacency, we now need to bring the material up to date: To contain the flood and to overcome it.” (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

This speech presents the allies of IB’s struggle: “magazines, institutions, youth organizations and activist groups” on one hand, the party AfD on the other. Again, the speech contrasts activism within the far-right movement to passivity, this time, passivity is also identified with dissent: “We do not have time for endless debates. It’s time for deeds”. Deliberation and differences of opinion are presented as disfunctional. Unity within the movement, and collective actions that aren’t put into doubt are demanded of IB’s followers. This is justified by invoking the metaphor of catastrophies, and floods specifically. As Wodak (2015) notes, the amplification of fear and the invocation of catastrophe and a state of emergency are central to right-wing populist politics. Followers are unified by instilling a sense of urgency and threat. And the metaphor of “floods” directly links natural disasters to immigrants, which even in mainstream discourses are described as “floods” and “flows” of migrants.

Illegitimate friends are barely identified. Racism is excused or rationalized, as in one post, where an author declares: “Prejudices in themselves are nothing objectionable, but a kind of working hypothesis which can be validated or not. […] Real racism in the actual sense of the word, as a devaluing stance that manifests as hatred against people of a different race, actually only exists in multiracial societies” (Identitäre Bewegung 2016). Antisemitism is rejected on strategic grounds:

Under a false flag

The Identitarian Pierre Aronnax in the magazine Blaue Narzisse on a problem that doesn’t just concern the AfD at the moment, but also the new right context in general. False prophets, which can’t hide their crude ideas and their fanaticism and damage through that in an egotistical manner the political cause and in the end, Germany itself, more than they help:

“There seem to be people, who seem to care more about their ideology – and especially the unsuccessful blaring out of it – and the harping-on on irrelevant and eccentric questions than about the real Germany. Everything the AfD could realize is being sabotaged. An end to mass immigration and a return to the rule of law, for example, are lightyears more important to this nation than discussions about an ostensible enmity of Jews against Christianity. Except, if you believe in all seriousness that that’s the most important thing. In that case: the door is open, you’re free to go.”

Let us not have our ideas damaged by such scatterbrains. Let’s stop them, otherwise we lose a unique chance. (Identitäre Bewegung 2016)

In this post, the movement tries to distance itself from antisemitic elements within the far-right. Interestingly, antisemitism is on one hand presented as “crude” and “fanatic”, as “eccentric” and “irrelevant”. Here, it is presented as an irrational ideology, and the expression of antisemitic views is explicitly framed as a betrayal of far-right goals, as “sabotage”. Actors who express antisemitic views are called “egotistical” for damaging the movement’s cause.

At the same time, it is denounced in terms that downplay its dangers, and instead presents it as “eccentric” and foolish, not as aggressive and dangerous. It is also notable that it is mainly the expression of antisemitic views that is criticized, not the views themselves. This is most clear when Pierre Aronnax declares other goals as “more important”, and invites anti-Semites to leave the movement if they believe “in all seriousness that that’s the most important thing”. This phrasing implies that the movement is open to tolerate antisemitism in its midst if those actors refrain from expressing their views and are open to suppressing these goals in favour of “more important” goals.

Overall, the posts of *Pegida* I analyzed showed similar patterns. The governing conservative and social democratic parties are consistently described as totalitarian, as in one post where a prominent member complains about receiving a 30-day ban on Facebook after one of her post contained a racial slur:

Facebook banned Tatjana Festerling once again for 30 days. The ban follows a preceding ban, between which Festerling has been unbanned for only 2 days. The cause for this is a posting of the official PEGIDA page on Facebook, where Festerling is a member of the editorial team. In the post the French minister for women’s rights, Laurence Rossignol, is cited. According to several news reports, Rossignol compared women who decide to wear Muslim clothes with “American negroes” that supported slavery.

Festerling perceives this repeated, baseless ban as a substantial intrusion on the constitutional right of free speech. Facebook has implemented censorship to silence oppositional voices.

Originator of this ban is, in the eyes of Festerling, federal censorship minister Heiko Maas, who assigned the Amadeu Antonio Foundation in cooperation with Facebook with the deletion of unwelcome posts. The Amadeu Antonio Foundation has gained sad notoriety, because she is represented as chair by the former unofficial employee of the GDR Stasi, Anetta Kahane (codename “IM Victoria”).

According to Maas, so called and not further defined “hate postings” should be deleted; in fact, though, every unpleasant opinion that doesn’t conform to the leftwing extremist worldview of a Heiko Maas is suppressed and prohibited.

Heiko Maas proves once more his fascist, antidemocratic attitude. Especially after the experience of the Nazi time and the GDR dictatorship members of this federal government should be obligated to ensure that unimpeded, free and constitutionally guaranteed free speech is safeguarded.

“International observers should – concerning the historical experiences in Germany – recognize the repeating, totalitarian patterns of the Nazi regime and the GDR dictatorship within our current government and take measures. Especially the Eastern-European countries should think about cutting off all diplomatic ties to Germany and call back their diplomats in protest of the fascist tendencies of the federal government”, said Festerling.

„European nations must act NOW to oppose the totalitarian development of Germany und the German leadership in the EU to continue to be able to further their own national interests. It shouldn’t be possible that German politicians, substantially influenced by a not democratically legitimized financial mogul like George Soros, steer all nations of Europe towards their doom,” Festerling continued. (Pegida 2016)

It is notable how this post constructs a conspiracy theory which links the ban of Festerling by Facebook directly to minister of interior Heiko Maas. As the posts notes, Festerling probably got banned from Facebook for posting a racial slur. While it is correct that Facebook increased bans for the violation of community guidelines and for posting content that contain “Volksverhetzung” (“incitement of the people”, a punishable offence in the German criminal code), the claims within the post that try to directly link the deletion practices of Facebook to the German government are largely false. The Amadeu Antonio Foundation does not delete posts on Facebook, nor is it a subordinate of the interior ministry. While Facebook’s deletion practices of posts have been publicly criticized, they are not guided by the German government or NGO actors (Niewendick 2016). Lastly, while Facebook’s deletion practices are not transparent, German law does not punish speech based on vague definitions of “Hate speech”, but based on libel laws and fighting words legislation that has not been changed during the time Maas was heading the interior ministry. Rather than debating legitimate criticism of Facebook’s practices and Maas’ legal initiatives, Festerling escalates the criticism to accuse the German government of dictatorial rule and censorship. Merkel’s government is accused of “repeating totalitarian patterns” and “fascist tendencies”, Maas is presented as a “left-wing extremist”, and the European Union itself is presented as under the totalitarian grasp of the German government. In posts like this, actual facts (Maas tried to get Facebook to increase their moderation of Facebook pages) and common criticisms (Facebooks deletion practices are intransparent, the Amatheu Antonio Foundation is headed by an activist who served as an informant of the GDR dictatorship) are combined with misinformation to construct a conspiracy theory that in the end presents German policy as totalitarian. In the last sentence, this is linked to billionaire George Soros, a figure commonly presented as an enemy by the far-right (Kalmar, Stevens und Worby 2018), as a shadowy figure who is implied to be responsible for Germany’s policy. In this way, a 30 day Facebook ban is linked to the Identitarian movement’s conspiracy theory that European elites participate in the “Great Replacement” and aim to replace European populations with foreigners. Similarly, in other posts, the Green party is described as pedophiles, their voters are considered “confused people” (Pegida 2016), the Left party is only referred to as the SED, the governing party of the former East-German dictatorship. Similarly, chancellor Angela Merkel is consistently referred to as “IM Erika” – in reference to a conspiracy theory that argues Merkel was a spy working for the GDR government under the name “Erika”. Another post is exemplary for how Pegida describes immigrants and refugees. The following post links to a news story that regional trains now have women-only compartments:

We’re sure that’s only necessary because soooo many ‘riiiiightwingers’ are going by train, molesting women, raping, grabbing and robbing, right?

This in no way has something to do with the ungrateful, misogynistic, sick ideology and culture of hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants and invaders, at least that’s what some do-gooders [German: “Gutmenschen”] are going to tell us!

Where did we go thanks to Angela #IMErika Merkel?

TO THE STREETS FRIENDS AND SHOW YOUR FACE! OPEN YOUR MOUTHS FOR A CHANGE IN POLICY! Its our last chance! (Pegida 2016)

In posts like this one, refugees and immigrants are presented as invaders. Islam is presented as a “sick ideology and culture”, people who agree with Merkel’s refugee policy are seen as “do-gooders” who misrepresent the dangers Pegida perceives. The threat of rightwing violence, meanwhile, is downplayed, by ridiculing the idea that rightwingers are a threat, and contrasting rightwing violence with sexual assaults and violent crimes committed by immigrants. Like IB, Pegida presents the threat of immigrants as catastrophic in nature: “It is our last chance”, immigrants are seen as invaders. This is further detailed in a post that cites an interview of FPÖ politician Strache, which Pegida shares to agrees with his statements:

YES, YES and YES again. #Merkelneedstogo!

Merkel’s refugee policy is “criminal”, and lead to a unrestraint flow of migrants, which “endangers all of Europe”. Strache: “She is the most dangerous politician in Europe. She opened the floodgates for Islamists, poverty migrants and soldiers of fortune whose worldview doesn’t fit in our Europe. This invasion shakes our society’s foundations.” A catastrophe is unavoidable, even civil war is “not unlikely” according to Strache. (Pegida 2016)

Again, refugees are compared with natural disasters, as a “flood”, and with military invaders. Refugees are presented as “poverty migrants” and “soldiers of fortune”, and the ethnopluralist conception of European communities is alluded to: Immigration is opposed because migrants “worldview” does not fit into German society, drawing a boundary that again presents cultural homogeneity as a precondition of peaceful coexistence. The coexistence of people of different cultures is presented as leading to “unavoidable” catastrophe, even “civil war”, language that serves to legitimize extreme acts of exclusion. Overall, Pegida shares with IB the core ideas of ethnopluralism: Migration is understood as catastrophic, cultural pluralism within one society is presented as fatal.

As far as friends go, the page identifies far-right protest movements and the far-right party AfD as their allies. Identifying the next steps for their movement, they write:

Our next steps are:

* Protest in the inner city on the 3rd of October with Götz Kubitschek (einprozent.de/sezession.de), Renate Sandvoß (journalistenwatch.com) and Michael Stürzenberger (Freiheit)!
* Special event date and details will be mentioned on the protest on the 3rd of October.
* 2nd birthday of PEGIDA on the 17th of October on the theater plaza
* Strengthen and deepen the collaboration with the AfD to unite patriotic forces and stabilization of a parliamentary arm (sadly not yet in the state association in Saxony, but with many other state associations, hopes for Saxony haven’t died yet)

Protest movements and allied activists within the far-right, including far-right media, are identified as friends of the movement. The right-wing party AfD is considered the “parliamentary arm of the movement”, although the Saxony chapter of the party, at that point in time, refused to collaborate with the protest movement. In a similar vein, rightwing populist politicians from parties all over Europe are cited approvingly, including Hungary’s Viktor Orban, Austria’s Strache and Netherlands’ Geert Wilders.

Lastly, I analyzed the posts of one of the pages of the more moderate community of contra-refugee pages. This page shared many discourses with the previous contra-refugee pages, but expressed those views through implication rather than explicit mention. For example, several posts expand on the “great replacement” narrative of the Identitarian movement, by posting statistics on birth rates and IQ differences between nations, to imply that immigration endangers the genetic qualities of Germans:

Average number of children in global comparison:
Exact data here: [link] (Informationsschalter 2016)

Average IQ values in global comparison

Complete list: [link] (Informationsschalter 2016)

The post discussing IQ differences links to a website discussing the research of Professor Richard Lynn, a psychologist criticized for his one-sided interpretation of data on IQ differences between ethnic groups (Barnett und Williams 2004). Based on such claims, the page implies at several points that EU politicians consciously aim to replace the population with immigrants:

Europe wants to take in 70 Million migrants. EU commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos is working towards that goal – everything else in the video.

Wikipedia: [link]

Full episode: [link] (Informationsschalter 2016)

This is combined with posts that imply anti-democratic goals of mainstream parties; e.g., one post claims:

Our political elite tries, slowly but steadily, to dissolve of individual European nation states to establish a European superstate. The nation state is supposedly no longer up to date: too small, too unimportant, not enough leverage against other superpowers, *too democratic* [emphasis added]*,* financially fractured, in disagreement about military and economy, and it *represents too many national interests in the way of the elite* [emphasis added] (Informationsschalter 2016).

Similarly, statements and parliamentary speeches are linked to, but the content of those speeches is mis-paraphrased to imply ulterior motives:

Merkel wants to ‘build bridges’ to Africa and to the Muslims! This means a socialist globalized redistribution: the ‘rich Germany’ is supposed to give to poor Africans and Muslims” (Informationsschalter 2016).

Similarly, a speech that discusses incivility in online spaces is paraphrased as “Merkel demands internet media censorship!” (Informationsschalter 2016). In several posts, experts and former politicians are cited who claim politicians aim to harm the German population or implement authoritarian measures:

“The impoverishment of the middle class is on purpose!”

Says professor Radermacher, head of the Forschungsinstitut für anwendungsorientierte Wissensverarbeitung. Link to his lecture: [link] (Informationsschalter 2016)

Willy Wimmer warns the population:

“Germany is going to be turned into a surveillance state!”

Willy Wimmer was a CDU politician for 33 years. Full interview here: [link] (Informationsschalter 2016)

Similarly, politicians that are suffering from harassment campaigns against them are cited in a way that implies they deserve the treatment:

After her *anti-German speech* [emphasis added] in the parliament Stefanie von Berg received a shitstorm in the internet and even calls over months. Here she explains how this exhausted her and how she is now going to court (Informationsschalter 2016).

Other than that, claims of anti-democratic behavior are mostly directed against mainstream media, as in one post that cites a citizen claiming: “The forced-into-line [German: gleichgeschaltet] media today resemble the TV of the GDR” (Informationsschalter 2016). When audience members in a public broadcasting talk show clapped in support of a social democrat’s statement, a post on Informationsschalter claims: “We heard the clappers in the audience were obviously prepared – what do you think about this?” (Informationsschalter 2016). Linking to another public broadcasting talk show on the topic of Donald Trump’s policies, the page asks: “How neutral are our GEZ [i.e. publicly funded] media and how much propaganda are they engaged in?” (Informationsschalter 2016).

 Capitalism is criticized in the form of criticism of the “monetary system”, blaming the failures of modern societies on rent and usury – common antisemitic tropes (Wodak 2015):

The mistake in the monetary system – give me the world plus 5%

Link to full movie: [link] (Informationsschalter 2016)

This 12-year-old explains the enslavement of mankind through banks and governments! – German translation! (Informationsschalter 2016)

The page mainly uses ambivalent phrasing and implications, and relies on statements by external sources, but they never present opponents as legitimate.

As far as who this page considers friends, like in the other contra-refugee pages, the right-wing populist party AfD is frequently cited approvingly. At the same time, the conservative CSU (part of the grand coalition and sister party to the governing CDU) is presented as a contra-refugee alternative to the CDU: “Seehofer [a CSU politician] the new chancellor? He wants to possibly run in 2017. Seehofer or Merkel? Write us in a comment!” (Informationsschalter 2016). In a similar vein, individual politicians from parties that contradict Merkel’s refugee policy are cited: “Willy Wimmer [CDU] demands Merkel resignation!” (Informationsschalter 2016).

Concerning illegitimate friends, racism is again only mentioned as a rhetorical strategy of supposedly pro-refugee sources: “The politically correct ZDF [public broadcasting] sent an intern to drag CSU secretary Andreas Scheuer through the mud by using the racism cudgel [German: “Rassismuskeule”, a term for invalid accusations of racism]” (Informationsschalter 2016).

Overall, I find that the far-right and contra-refugee activist pages do not consider any opponents as fully legitimate. Central ideas of the far-right IB pages can also be found within the Pegida protest movement and more moderate pages: Immigration is presented as promoted by the European Union against the interests of the European people, politicians who support admission of refugees are described as dictatorial and conspiratorial. Citizens who agree with such policies are at best passive and delusional, at worst supporters of an invasion. Democracy is understood as only possible within a homogenous culture, boundaries are drawn along lines of cultural identity. This leads to a deeply anti-pluralist understanding of politics: Citizens either support exclusionary policies to maintain a German identity against anyone who tries to migrate, or they are considered traitors. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, such a homogenous vision of society leads not just to the exclusion and mistreatment of refugees and migrants, but also to a vision of democracy that cannot accept legitimate opponents (Spektorowski 2003).

**Enemies, legitimate opponents, friends, and illegitimate friends within pro-refugee pages and Caritas**

A similarly limited view can be found within the far-left page Nationalismus ist keine Alternative (“nationalism is not an alternative”), which clearly distinguishes enemies and friends. As their name denotes, they present themselves in opposition to the Alternative für Deutschland, the right-wing populist party in Germany. But those aren’t the only enemies the page identifies:

It’s clear: coordinated protests against the AfD must continue. In Fall there will be regional elections in Lower Saxony, [Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania](https://www.linguee.de/englisch-deutsch/uebersetzung/Mecklenburg-Western%2BPomerania.html) and Berlin and in 2017 the election for the Bundestag. We will continue to pursue the goal to prevent the organizational backbone of the völkisch coalition from shifting public discourse to the right without opposition.

But it’s also clear: the right fringe isn’t enough. Nationalism isn’t a unique attribute of the AfD and their successes didn’t occur out of nowhere. The renovation of the fortress Europe with its deadly consequences is only possible through the interplay of bourgeois center and right fringe. The actors of walling-off, of black-red-green, who prepare the end of the narrative of the ‘refugee crisis’ are part of the nationalist party [German: “Mit von der Partie”]. The Arab and Greek Spring was followed by a European winter of a state of emergency and of walling off. We don’t want to let that happen unopposed and attack the organizers of state-led deprivation of rights of refugees, actors of walling-off and their borders. (NikA 2016).

Here, anti-refugee policies are presented as the results of an interplay of far-right parties like AfD on one hand, and restrictive policies by mainstream parties on the other. The far-right and actors of established political parties are presented as a unified force that act to wall off Europe, to enact the “Fortress Europe”. In several posts they equate mainstream parties with the far right:

Plauen and Stuttgart are two sides of the völkisch nationalism, which promotes an ethnic homogenization and makes everything foreign available for the hunt, in the crazy hope of gaining agency over their own fears of migrants, social descent and, in general, the whims of capitalism. But the völkisch nationalism isn’t an alternative to the hegemonic policy that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer, but only radicalizes it. Nor are the hegemonic politics an alternative to the völkisch, but only another variation of the same bourgeois nationalism. Here, you don’t kill them yourself, you let them drown and pay others for shooting or deporting, as currently in Turkey. The “normal” nationalism, too, shelves the rights and happiness of individuals in favor of the greater good of the economic location with talks of Swabian housewives and tightening one’s belts. A real alternative to the ruling nightmare can only be in a solidarity perspective, which doesn’t bow to capitalist constraints, but abolishes them. (NikA 2016)

On the last day before the election we want to reiterate what we think of the AfD, but also of the other parties. Against the AfD, whose racist hate speech is clearest. Who wants to shoot at refugees and close the borders. Against the deadly dispassion with which Greens, CDU and SPD separate people into “usable” and “unuseful” for the economy. This policy is deadly. We don’t want a fortress Europe, no barbed wire, no military against humans, which are fleeing from great hardship!

#returntosender #nika #nationalismisnoalternative

In Nauen, in last August, racists burned down a refugee home – AfD is directly responsible with its hate speech. It is arsonist in suit and mouthpiece for violence at once. Representative for the countless attacks and assaults, we went to Nauen, collected the results of their policy and returned it to the sender. AfD claims they are not responsible and refused to take the package. We still left a souvenir – the highly toxic return package was returned by our dangerous goods forwarders by registered mail.

The AfD is talking about shooting orders and walling-off and takes up a popular mindset within the majority: utilitarian racism. People are presented as a burden for the economic location Germany, there’s silence about the responsibility of German-European policy for the causes of flight. In this point, AfD is completely in agreement with governing parties. Because the nationalist separation of the world in “us” and “them” is the common ground for business in the fortress Europe. (NikA 2016)

In these posts, NikA elaborates the key points of their political ideology. Racist exclusion is seen as an expression of capitalist societies’ need to evaluate people on utilitarian grounds, leading to an exclusion of migrants and refugees to stabilize a global division of labour that only allows highly skilled labourers to move to economically advanced nations while forcing unskilled labourers to remain in poorer countries (Wingard 2013). Opposition to such exclusion, then, is only possible through anti-capitalist policies that completely overcome existing institutions – all actors within existing liberal-democracy are considered complicit in maintaining the conditions that lead to the rise of far-right parties, and policies from mainstream parties that limit migration are seen as a mere extension of far-right tendencies within society. This even includes the parliamentary party the Left: “From CDU to the Left party, everyone talks about moving people out of the country. […] The racists on the street and in parliament work hand in hand” (NikA 2016).

 This corresponds to a view that Mouffe (2013, 65-84) has described as a “withdrawal from institutions”: Such a view of radical politics considers all engagement with existing liberal-democratic structures and party politics as reproducing capitalist society, and considers a transformation of society from within existing democratic institutions as impossible. This leads a radical left-wing politics that cannot consider existing liberal-democratic institutions as legitimate and cannot imagine political contest within such institutions as a way to democratically process social antagonisms. The end result are political movements that, on one hand, cannot accept legitimate political opponents, because opposing actors are necessarily considered complicit in oppressive structures. It also leads to ineffective political strategies, since any political transformation through the democratic process is ruled out. NikA states explicitly:

After the massive shift to the right at the state elections the nationwide campaign “Nationalismus ist keine Alternative” calls for using the AfD party congress in Stuttgart, on the 30th of April, to take a stand against the further walling-off of Europe. The party congress of the völkisch party is the fitting occation to show practical opposition to the shift to the right within society, including using means of civil disobedience. Stuttgart isn’t just the location where AfD will try to hold its next party congress; the city is also the center of power for the “black Greens” surrounding Kretschmann that support inhumane measures to fend off fleeing people at the borders and the deprivation of social rights of poor people in this country and that enable this climate of breaking social solidarity. Against that, we will use all means of civil disobedience to make clear that racism has its price. Because the historical experience shows that the shift to the right within parties and parliaments will not be stopped there. In the end, the street decides. (NikA 2016).

Participation in party politics is explicitly ruled out, NikA can imagine political change only as the result of a transformation from outside of the political process. Pressures from the street – through protest and civil disobediences – are supposed to allow for a transformation of society itself. But, as Mouffe (2013, 65-84) has pointed out, such a strategy is unable to actually transform society: If movements refuse to participate in democratic politics, they are unable to enact any lasting political change.

As far as friends are concerned, Nationalismus ist keine Alternative defines protest movements and antifa groups as their allies. Blockupy is referred to as “our favorite umbrella-movement” (NikA 2016), and several posts call for participation in antifa protests, and left-wing youth congresses. Outside of that, the movement repeatedly identifies a post-capitalist society as the alternative to racist policies:

All over the nation antifascists are warming up against the AfD. In the Rhine-Neckar region leftwing groups have united to start the local campaign “We can do this! Against racism and Capitalism. For a solidarity society”.

Goal of our campaign is to strengthen leftwing and antiracist positions during the period of the state elections in Rhineland Palatinate and Baden Wuerttemberg. against crisis, austerity and racist hate speech we posit the idea of a solidary society without capitalist exploitation. That means fighting together, against rising rental fees, for affordable living spaces and against exploitation at work. (NikA 2016).

Therefore, NikA identifies extra-parliamentary left-wing movements as the only true opposition to right-wing politics. The movement does not distance itself from any illegitimate friends, either. Criticism of the far left within mainstream media is rejected:

“The charge of extremism against the radical left isn’t new. It serves as a denunciation of that political opposition that doesn’t allow itself to be enclosed or institutionalized through a statist policy of ‘social peace’ contrary to a criticism of the social antagonism between capital and wage-earners” (NikA 2016).

Overall, NikA’s ideology results in a dichotomy that places both mainstream political institutions and parties and far-right movements on the same side, as participants within a capitalist society that necessarily reproduces racist structures. Unlike the pluralist radical left-wing politics that agonistic pluralists envision (Mouffe 2013), this does not leave room for democratic opposition: All conflicts are treated as antagonisms between enemies that cannot be transformed into agonistic contest. Where Mouffe argues for seeing democratic conservative and liberal parties as legitimate opponents within a liberal constitution, and for engaging them in parliamentary politics as legitimate opponents (Mouffe 2000), NikA instead argues that all parliamentary politics should be considered illegitimate and opposed.

In contrast, the distinction between illegitimate and legitimate opponents on the page of the pro-refugee activist group Pro Asyl is more nuanced. Like the far left they do connect racism within the far right to racism within moderate parties:

The debate concerning refugees is getting more aggressive: One restriction of asylum is following the next, racist thinking has spread into the center, and the number of right-wing violent acts against refugees is constantly increasing. (ProAsyl 2016).

At the same time, it is notable that, unlike NikA, ProAsyl treats the spread of racism into moderate political parties not as an unavoidable consequence of capitalism, but as an intrusion into a mainstream that is otherwise legitimate. Unlike NikA, which claims racism is characteristic of mainstream parties, ProAsyl treats it as a threat that enters the center from outside. This phrasing implies the center itself isn’t illegitimate, it’s only racist thinking that invades the democratic mainstream that should be criticized.

They also equate conservative and far-right parties when assigning blame for increased racism, as when they comment on a news article they link to: “A great editorial on how CSU [the conservative party], AfD [the right-wing populist party], and Pegida managed to push the discourse further to the right” (ProAsyl 2016). Another post is similarly critical of anti-refugee positions within the Green party:

“If you want to be a member of the opposition these days, who is willing to risk something, you only need to say ‘I stand with every point of the UN declaration of human rights.’ There is no other position, that leads to that much hate, malice and contempt.”

The both sad and fitting conclusion of this strong article that describes how rightwing populism has become part of our political culture – even with Green politicians like Boris Palmer. (ProAsyl 2016)

In this post, ProAsyl cites a news editorial that presents defending human rights as a marginalized position within German discourse, which allows groups like ProAsyl the claim to counter-publicity against a mainstream that is perceived as being dominanted by anti-refugee positions. They point to the hatred and contempt pro-refugee views encounter to present themselves as marginalized within the mainstream, building a counter-identity based on this experience of hostility from within dominant publics (Warner 2005, 119). This hostility towards pro-refugee positions is equated to a hostility to human rights themselves, marking hegemonic contra-refugees in opposition to liberal-democratic values. In this sense, contra-refugee positions are delegitimized. At the same time, ProAsyl is attenuating that position by claiming that this opposition to human rights is due to rightwing populism that has become “part of our political culture” – it’s not the dominant public itself that is delegitimized, only the part of political culture that adopted rightwing populism. Unlike NikA, such positions are not ascribed to political parties as a whole: In the last sentence, ProAsyl notes how “even Green politicians” adopt rightwing populism. The “even” implies that such positions aren’t dominant within the Green party, and that it is the individual politician, not the party that is being criticized.

 This post also makes clear how ProAsyl positions itself in relation to the dominant media public: They consider themselves marginalized within the mainstream, but they also point out voices from within the mainstream that agree with ProAsyl positions: The media are not presented as a “cartel” of conspiratorial actors, as they are within contra-refugee pages, but rather as a battleground in which different positions struggle for hegemony (Mouffe 2000).

As far as legitimate opponents go, Anti-refugee positions of mainstream parties, and their policies, are usually criticized, but not delegitimized, as in this post that calls for sending e-mails to parliamentarians:

Next week there’ll be a vote on the asylum package II. We invite all members of the German parliament to reject the law! So do you? Then participate in our e-mail campaign. (ProAsyl 2016).

Arguments from opponents are countered in videos:

ʻThey don’t want to work, but abuse our welfare state’ – how do refugees respond to this preconceived notion? Watch episode 5 of the video series by catamaranfilms! (ProAsyl 2016).

Similarly, social democrats are criticized without delegitimizing them:

When the asylum package II was released in February, leading SPD politicians defended the restrictions to asylum.

Pro Asyl feared, that the family reunion of refugees would be massively limited. That came true! [link]

We demand: Syrian refugees have to gain refugee status following the Geneva refugee convention! (ProAsyl 2016).

These posts make clear that ProAsyl makes a distinction between illegitimate racist policies and political parties they oppose as legitimate actors within the liberal democratic system. Opponents from mainstream political parties are never referred to as dictatorial or totalitarian, instead, ProAsyl treats them as opponents that have to be defeated or convinced through campaigns and protest and doesn’t question their legitimacy as participants within the democratic contest. They appeal to them as legitimate representatives of the democratic system that can be persuaded through arguments and appeals.

As far as friends and allies go, the Green party and Left party are cited approvingly:

About time: With a new law, Greens and the Left want to make family reunions for persons granted subsidiary protection – and even some SPD representatives seem to have recognized what they agreed to with the asylum package II. (ProAsyl 2016)

Outside of party politics, the group links to civil society organizations: “In our overview map you will find more than 700 initiatives from all over Germany that look forward to getting new voluntary helpers!” (ProAsyl 2016).

Interestingly, as far as illegitimate friends go, the page does not distance itself from far-left groups; instead, in one post, they approvingly reference the previously analyzed far-left group Nationalismus ist keine Alternative:

For months the AfD has been agitating against refugees, today she got back the results of their hate speech: Activists of the campaign ‘Nationalismus ist keine Alternative’ brought the consequences of their policy to the spiritual arsonists of the AfD. (ProAsyl 2016).

This references an event in which NikA activists stole the remains of a burned-down refugee home to lay them at the doorstep of the AfD party headquarter. ProAsyl mentions this approvingly and links to a news article referencing the event. ProAsyl does not distance itself from the radical rhetoric of the group.

 Overall, then, we can see that ProAsyl clearly differentiates between legitimate opponents on one hand, and illegitimate opponents on the other: They portray a rise of racist violence and rightwing populist rhetoric as the main threat and as illegitimate, with AfD being presented as completely illegitimate, and individual politicians from mainstream parties, and parts of the conservative CSU as also participating in this rise of far-right policies. At the same time, they do not claim that all mainstream parties are inherently illegitimate – instead, delegitimization is limited to AfD, the far-right and individual politicians. Mainstream parties and the government, on the other hand, are treated as legitimate opponents that should be opposed on democratic grounds as democratic actors.

Lastly, on the page Gegen die AfD, I found an even more nuanced distinction between illegitimate and legitimate positions in the refugee policy debate. Concerning enemies, they clearly define anti-constitutional positions within the AfD as illegitimate, as in one post that links to a report on a regional branch of the party: “Right-wing radicals, a clique or just embarrassing? The upper ranks of the right-wing populist AfD doesn’t exactly know what to think of their branch in Saarland” (Gegen die AfD 2016). Similarly, they cite news reports about the struggle within moderate and extremist parts within the party:

Claudia Martin in an interview

“Is head of the parliamentary faction Jörg Meuthen still in charge, or is he forced along by the hard right?

The AfD in general is missing leadership and discipline. They are missing orientation of what is legitimate and what isn’t. For Jörg Meuthen unity is important, he is very in need of harmony. But as the faction leader he needs to ask himself what he actually wants. Does he want to lead, or be led? Jörg Meuthen is the liberal showpiece of the party, it would do him well to position himself in that way.

What’s the balance of power within the faction?

There is a number of moderate parliamentarians, but they give in very fast when conflicts arise.

Do you have examples?

Herr Dr. Fiechtner, a practicing doctor, agreed in a position paper with giving health insurance cards to refugees. He pointed out hos they can help safe money. He received a lot of resistance from within the faction, but they did not confront the facts. Dr. Fiechtner was told to stay silent, if he had moral reservations. You can’t make policies like that, that’s not responsible. All of this despite the party wanting to be different, an alternative.” (Gegen die AfD 2016).

In these posts, the page presents the spread of illegitimate views within the party as a struggle between legitimate, moderate conservatives and far-right actors that are illegitimate. The page therefore differentiates between actors within the party that should be considered opponents that are respected as participants, and those actors that should be excluded. Connections with the far right are pointed out:

 Speaking at neo-Nazi rallies, being an AfD politician, and working for the LKA [police]. That resulted in a disciplinary letter. (Gegen die AfD 2016).

Similar links between conservative parties and far-right groups are criticized, for example in one post that comments on a CDU politician that switched to the AfD, where the page points out links to right-wing fraternities:

A member of a fraternity. We’re sure he still has friends in CDU.

According to FOCUS Michael Büge (previously CDU, state secretary in Berlin until he was relieved of duty in 2013) will manage the election campaign of the party on the national level. (Gegen die AfD 2016).

At the same time, the page remains ambivalent about the role of the party AfD: In another post, linking to a tv debate on the potential risks of right-wing populism, they share the conclusion:

AfD is viagra for democracy?

One statement by TV journalist Claus Strunz, which he made on Maischberger, has good chances to turn into the sentence of the year. “Populism is viagra for a fatiguing democracy” Strunz poetically summarized his position on political turbulences in Germany and the world. According to him, Germany was a “fair-weather-democracy” thus far. During bad weather the country now has gotten the unique chance to defend democratic values. “I think it’s good that we can finally argue, that the cuddling is over”

With that Strunz answered the main question of the show. Sandra Maischberger wanted to sort out with her guests how dangerous populism and the criticism by rightwing conservatives towards the chancellor is for democracy in general. Not all agreed with Strunz’ thesis. Journalist Bettina Gaus argued that you shouldn’t respond to discussions with populists. Publicist Richard David Precht was concerned about the fact, that our way of life, our economic model and digitalization lead into a direction that politics can’t answer any more.

Whether populism will damage democracy or not will remain to be seen. It’s clear though, that the irresponsible policy of the government and the disregard for public sentiment divide the country and will have unforeseeable consequences for the future. (Gegen die AfD 2016).

This ambivalent treatment of the AfD party is most clearly visible in a post that recollects how the page grew over time and contains the following paragraphs:

Time showed to us, that we get a lot of support, but also hate, insults, and threats up to death threats.

But we also had delightfully open discussions with AfD members, unforgettable here Piet Landreiter, back then still an AfD member. Who debated us openly, eye to eye, sometimes even agreed with us.

We never lost the desire to continue. It’s about everything, about our democracy (Gegen die AfD 2016).

Here, the page contrasts the illegitimate actions of AfD and far-right activists (insults and threats) with legitimate agonism they experienced with individual members of the party (delightfully open discussions). Here, the authors within the page make clear that they even differentiate between legitimate opponents from within the AfD party who are open to “delightfully open discussions” and a democratic struggle between opposing views, and illegitimate actors who do not accept liberal democratic rules for political engagement.

Mainstream parties, even if opposed, are treated as legitimate. The difference between agonistic respect and antagonistic condemnation is most clear in one post that links to a video excerpt in which AfD politician claims Merkel is to blame for terrorist attacks conducted by refugees:

However you may criticize Merkel, her course, or the mistakes she made. But faulting her for murders is disgusting and a definite low blow by the AfD.

#Maischberger needs to ask herself why they knowingly invite these rightwing provocateurs into shows. All for gaining viewers? These crazies don’t have opinions they share, only hate. And hate isn’t an opinion! (Gegen die AfD 2016)

In this post, Gegen die AfD contrasts legitimate dissent from illegitimate attacks against political opponents: Agonistic respect is maintained for those who criticize Merkel, and the author agrees that Merkel should be criticized for mistakes (“however you criticize her, or the mistakes she made”). At the same time, this is contrasted to the lack of disrespect AfD shows for political opponents: “faulting her for murders” is a “low blow”. The page demands agonistic respect for Merkel – even if you disagree with Merkel’s policies, she should not be delegitimized – and refuses agonistic respect towards AfD on the basis that the party does not extend respect to their opponents. This condemnation of AfD is contrasted with respectful criticism that Gegen die AfD extends towards mainstream parties CDU and SPD: for example in one post Gegen die AfD criticizes interview statements by SPD politician Opperman, who argued that CDU is to blame for the rise of AfD, because, in his view, conservative parties shifted to far to the center, leaving space for AfD to enter the political arena. Gegen die AfD offers the following rebuttal:

We don’t believe that mutual accusations who is to blame for the rise of AfD are useful.

We still report on it, naturally, but want to add a couple of comments to the following news article:

* Oppermann is criticizing the CDU for leaving conservative positions and a vacuum that opened up space for AfD. That means, in consequence, to criticize CDU for stopping nuclear power, ending the draft and agreeing with minimum wages. All policies SPD wanted, too – you can’t criticize others for that
* The refugee crisis, supposedly, was managed badly and the population wasn’t told the whole truth about dimensions and hardships. But isn’t SPD part of the government? Didn’t they have the possibility, to implement what they demand here?
* CDU is supposedly without concept concerning refugee policy? We believe that, too. On the other hand: Where did SPD offer their concept? (Gegen die AfD 2016)

In this post, Gegen die AfD criticizes positions of a SPD politician. At the same time, the opposing views are treated as those of legitimate actors, and CDU – which, in other posts is being criticized by Gegen die AfD, is here defended against accusations by SPD. Failures of both parties are debated and weighed, and none of those failures are seen as cause for treating the parties as illegitimate actors.

As far as who the page considers friends, in one post celebrating the page reaching 50,000 followers, they declare: “To introduce our political orientation, in our team there are people from the Left, anarchists, liberals, pirate party members, SPD and even a Green party member. Politically, we don’t conform to one norm, and that’s good” (Gegen die AfD 2016). Later in the same post, they link to regional groups and other pages by those parties, and unions, as they regularly do in posts. Immigrants and refugees are in the same vein identified as friends, as in a post commenting on elections in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia: “The Pott [nickname for the region] does have its problems #AfD. But in fact, we’ve been multicultural for over 150 years. Remember that!” (Gegen die AfD 2016).

This inclusion of far-left members in the admin staff of the page leads to few posts distancing them from illegitimate friends: Violence from antifa groups is downplayed, as in one post that reports on neo-Nazi groups rioting in Dresden, and sarcastically asks: “Oh, it wasn’t the evil antifa?” (Gegen die AfD 2016). In another post, they do report a statement by a local government on a particularly violent antifa group, which is described as “oriented towards violence” and supporting “protest calls for violence”, but the page only reports those statements without evaluating them.

Overall, Gegen die AfD has the most nuanced perspective regarding who they consider friends or enemies: They try to distinguish racist positions within AfD and other parties that are incompatible with liberal democracy from conservative views that, in their view, should be engaged as respected opponents which are treated with agonistic respect. The page demands agonistic respect from actors within the public arena and clearly distinguished between opponents that deserve agonistic respect, and those who don’t.

Lastly, the page Caritas can be seen as a stark contrast to the other pages, as it barely defines opponents or enemies. In one post, they link to a page that offers help in family arguments through SMS: “At Christmas, arguments can get heated. This page helps you not to run out of arguments when it’s about AfD, racism, or refugees” (Caritas 2016). They make clear that racism is illegitimate, as in one post, where they link to a newspaper’s map of attacks on refugees and refugee homes: “A map that shows how our country is in xenophobia’s grip” (Caritas 2016). Other than that, clear enemies are not mentioned.

Outside of that, they link to counterarguments against far-right narratives, as in one post: “Renowned German artists illustrate the top 15 fears of concerned citizens [German: “Besorgte Bürger”, an idiom for citizens with prejudices] – and disprove them with facts” (Caritas 2016). Similarly, politicians are only mentioned in appeals that do not delegitimize them, as in one post: “Urgent call to Horst Seehofer and all other politicians: Please practice verbal disarmament [German: “Bitte rüsten Sie verbal ab!”, an idiom calling for civil language]!” (Caritas 2016). In posts like these, Caritas calls on politicians to treat their opponents fairly.

As far as friends are concerned, the page mostly posts testimonials of voluntary workers. In one post they describe a worker in a refugee home: “Really nice, those Germans. Pleasantly pragmatic, hearty and humane. That’s how it’s supposed to be! Thank you, Michael” (Caritas 2016). Other than that, the government is presented as an ally in helping refugees: “The chancellor was thanking refugee helpers at the caritas congress for their engagement. Now we have a video from the government” (Caritas 2016). Refugees themselves are presented as deserving of aid:

50 adolescents that were fleeing without their parents are living in the children’s and youth home of Caritas Rheine. After school it’s time for cooking and eating together. We wish you a great arrival! (Caritas 2016).

As these examples indicate, the page rarely posts about social antagonisms, instead trying to spread positive news about the organization’s aid.

Overall, the page doesn’t lay claim to counter-publicity at all – Caritas mostly expresses concerns of a civil society actor that is accepted within dominant publics and doesn’t view political conflicts in antagonistic terms. The page mostly tries to spread a positive image for voluntary helpers, and avoids political conflicts.

Overall, I find that the construction of opponents varies widely amongst the pro-refugee pages. While far-left Nationalismus ist keine Alternative presents a Manichean anticapitalism in which far-right movements and moderate liberal political actors are seen as equally undemocratic and illegitimate, and a liberal democratic order is rejected in favor of far-left politics that aim to transcend capitalism through overcoming the political system, the activist and moderate pro-refugee pages offer a far more nuanced picture of their opponents: They clearly distinguish between legitimate opponents that should be opposed within democratic institutions but treated with respect, and anti-democratic movements from the right fringe that do not deserve agonistic respect. Thus, they do foster agonistic respect for moderate opponents, while arguing for the rejection of far-right positions.

Interestingly, a condemnation of anti-pluralist far-left politics does not take place within these pages – while they criticize illiberal, exclusionary positions from within far-right parties and activists, no such line is drawn against actors from the left.

**Outliers: Conspiracy pages**

Gegen den Strom, the conspiracy theory page I analysed, showed a very complex pattern. On one hand, the posts on the page show a patter of trying to balance different views and not impose the author’s views on the reader, and the author distances himself from more open conspiracy theories, as we will see, on the other hand, the page presents a Manichean view of politics, where clearly malevolent elites are contrasted with benevolent regular people who only need to be informed of the evil deeds of the elites to rise against them.

In one post, the main elements of Gegen den Strom’s worldview are presented:

It goes against the grain with me that our hypocritical media are not condemning Western military organizations. At least since 9/11, the worst terror organization in the world is called: the USA.

Why do I assess the US as worse than the IS? The US are not just spreading suffering and death, they also lay the foundation for the emergence of new (enemy and!!! allied) terror organizations.

The crimes of the US after the second world war are a common theme in our history. Whether they abolished democracies in favor of dictatorships or attacked countries under false pretenses and lies: Every time more suffering was the result. The FED, the “normal” banks and the IWF are nothing more than mafia-like predatory organizations that push social inequalities to immeasurable proportions. If the 62 richest people on as much as the 3.6 billion poorest people of the world, that’s evidence of incapacity and a disgrace for our civilization. Without the shameful actions of the US the IS, Al Kaida and many other terrorist organizations would not exist. Israel would have to find compromises with Palestinians, and the current refugee crisis would not have emerged. The world needs to emancipate from the US! (Gegen den Strom 2016)

The main opponent in many of Gegen den Strom’s posts are the United States government, perceived as the main source of suffering within the world. US military actions are presented as the cause for crises and terrorist acts, blowback from past US interventions and intelligence activities that helped foster terrorist groups are presented as evidence that the US is the main cause of society’s ills.

The assessment of capitalism follows a similar rationale: the US’ role in forming the main institutions of globalized capitalism is used to present them as responsible for the enormous inequalities of wealth within globalized capitalism. The views would commonly be associated with the far left, but the author maintains that left-wing politics should not be the goal:

Today we make a clear statement: Yes, we are a uncomfortable blog! We talk about uncomfortable facts and reach more and more people we educate. But education means showing both good and bad examples! Our enemy isn’t the colour of one’s skin, but Merkel & Co. who try to play us off against each other, so they can do their work for banksters and the super rich in peace. Please see through their act and don’t let yourselves be carried away to generalizations. “Left” and “right” belong in the 20th century. We need educated people who are brave enough to see facts from different perspectives. Unite, because together we are many! To every peaceful foreigner/Muslim/migrant:

Please take a stand, if possible, to show that you appreciate this country. Images like the ones in this video are the best means for unity! (Gegen den Strom 2016)

In this post, several elements of GDS’ worldview can be observed. Traditional political distinctions along the lines of left/right are opposed, instead, the author calls for unity across differences. It is a political view that Mouffe (2013) would consider denying the Political: Political differences are not seen as the unavoidable result of a pluralist society, but instead, divisions that need to be overcome in a unified, restored whole. This depoliticized conception of politics sees divisions in society not as the result of unavoidable antagonisms that arise within society, but rather as external to society – caused by political elites who “play us off against each other”. Conflicts are not caused by differences of opinion and conflicts of interest of regular citizens, but only caused by political elites. This leads to a rejection of all political parties as illegitimate:

Merkel needs to go! Today we are doing something interesting – we argue in favour of this slogan, but not with the refugee crisis! Because there are good reasons to look at the facts while making distinctions. But how about arguing with the dissolution of the social market economy through CDU/SPD/FDP and Greens? Because here you can talk about treason against the people. (Gegen den Strom 2016)

Here, the author takes up the right-wing slogan “Merkel needs to go!”, which emerged to protest Germany’s refugee policy, but instead focuses it on Merkel’s economic policy. The conservative party, and all other mainstream parties, are presented as traitors to the German people for their economic policies. Since social divisions are not understood as emerging from conflicts within society, which should be processed in an agonistic, respectful matter, the author instead sees mainstream parties as an expression of elite interests opposed to the people. All mainstream parties are considered illegitimate. The same is true for their voters:

Please share!

Volker Pispers is telling us where our turbocapitalist journey will lead us.

Merkel’s there is not alternative and the lemming-like blind following of the majority of people will lead this country to doom.

Here a couple of examples:

Right now 50% of Germans need to share 1% of our wealth.

The richest and strongest, through capital gains and business taxes pay less than half of what the working population pays through labour taxes.

While highly educated people leave Germany, undereducated people migrate into the country, which you need to invest in before getting any returns.

Banks and corporations are de facto incorporated into law making procedures. The needs of the regular people haven’t been shown consideration for 20 years. TTIP etc. will destroy democracy further and transfer even more money to the rich and super rich. (Gegen den Strom 2016)

In posts like this one, regular voters are presented as blind followers – since the author cannot consider opposing views as emanating from conflicts within society, voters for mainstream parties are considered blind and unknowing, rather than informed voters who happen to disagree with him. He has the same view of right-wing and left-wing groups:

Media and politics keep preaching to us daily that we need to fight each other. And they are successful: Whole sections of the population fight each other and the people can be seen as divided. This condition is of course ideal – for the money nobility and for the elites to stay in poer. A divided people fighting among themselves is ideal for transferring power to the corporations (free trade agreements) and for restarting the Cold War (expansion of NATO to the East). Wealth is moving from below to top and from Germany to the US. No problem: CDU and SPD are completely submissive to the US and an opposition of the people is prevented. Followers of the left and right do not even understand that the play a game where they are chess pieces on the board of globalization.

My advice:

Left activists: more arguments, more education. No arrogance, no calling others Nazis. And spend a little time on our future.

People oriented to the right: if they attack you, don’t react to it and stay reasonable.

There is immense media manipulation and both sides fall to the extreme and unrealistic. The world isn’t black and white. Neither are Muslims/Arabs at fault for everything, nor are they the only problem we have. Yes, there is criminality and yes, refugees are expensive. But without Western wars and exploitation there would be no “foreigners” for you to be scared about. One more thing: everyday racism (stupid comments against immigrants/foreigners), just like being called a Nazi, is causing acts of defiance and divides society and the people. Just like leftwing activists, you should slow down and think about it calmly. (Gegen den Strom 2016)

Conflicts between the left and the right are understood as misunderstandings, neither mainstream parties nor the far-left or far-right opposition are understood as legitimate opponents of the political elite, but rather as manipulated followers who should overcome their differences. In this view, no conflicts among citizens spring from genuine conflicts of interest or political disagreements – they are all just an effect of media manipulation.

Interestingly, this leads the author to call on his readers to be less extreme and weigh different views, which also leads to a very balanced view regarding refugees and immigrants: they are neither condemned, nor are they presented as unproblematic: Issues with crime and the costs of integration are weighed. At the same time, the author presents a depoliticized solution for the issue, by claiming immigration would cease if US foreign policy and economic policy changed.

As far as legitimate opponents go, the page does oppose the mainstream media’s treatment of the party AfD, and, while presenting mainstream parties as illegitimate, and opposing the economic polices of AfD, he considers them legitimate opponents which should be treated more fairly:

AfD is xenophobic and racist! That’s what you hear in the media.

Usually, Höcke is presented as the ultimate proof – and then the final decision is made.

But do short and one-sided reports do justice to the complex truth?

Here is a video that shows the other side. As always: I want to make you think. What conclusions to draw is up to yourselves! (Gegen den Strom 2016)

Other than that, though, the space for legitimate disagreement is quite narrow. As previously argued, followers of mainstream political parties, and left-wing and right-wing activists are considered manipulated and misguided, and the actors of mainstream parties, media and economic elites are considered illegitimate.

As far as friends go, the page identifies politicians of the Left party as allies in the fight against capitalist plutocracy. Sahra Wagenknecht, a politician known for both far-left economic views, and her skepticism towards immigration, is presented as speaking truth to power:

What we’ve been demanding for months is now expressed by Sahra Wagenknecht…
This is the only way to solve the refugee crisis FOR REAL! Please share! (Gegen den Strom 2016)

In this way, the left party, and Wagenknecht in particular, are presented as the only actors opposing the political elites. Outside of party politics, the page aims at converting readers to its own protest movement:

If you follow my page and other companions you sometimes ask yourself: Why aren’t millions in the streets? Why is Merkel not in jail? Of course a protest platform is missing which acts against turbocapitalism and the limitless greed of the mighty. But at least: I’m working on it. Another aspect is the limitless stupidity of a large part of our population. Our country, possibly the whole world, is sinking into chaos, financial dictatorship, destruction of the environment, war and terror. In fact, most media content is banal, shallow and only for entertainment. Who is dating who? Who has the biggest car? Who is simulating on reality TV to be stupider than consumers? Who is the Babo of the clique? What news are there of prominent person XY? Those are the big questions in our media that 90-95% of the population care about. All those people can barely be reached with the challenges of our time and especially at home, instead of on the street. Is everything hopeless? No! Thank god we do not depend on the media victims if we stick together. Because a successful protest only needs about 1% of the population on the street. Also comforting: Every day many people wake up and become educated citizens. We are growing in numbers! (Gegen den Strom 2016)

Followers of the page are contrasted with the lazy, passive general populace, and the site aims to inspire its readers to form a new protest movement. At the same time, since both left-wing and right-wing activism, and mainstream politics are opposed, the page struggles to form “chains of equivalence” between different camps – that is links between their movements and the issues Gegen den Strom is concerned with – the movement is only attractive for the initiated and the followers of this page and similar conspiracy theory pages.

As far as illegitimate opponents are considered, the page tries to distance itself from more open conspiracy theories, as can be found in other pages within the cluster of facebook pages:

We are few people at the moment, but we are becoming more each day! Please help and educate other people. Please dispense with slogans and conspiracy theories which can deter naïve people. We need to convince them with substantive arguments! (Gegen den Strom 2016)

In sum, the page presents a world view where democracy within capitalist societies is on the brink of breakdown, owing to the influence of mainstream parties and the influence of the United States. Both mainstream parties and right-wing and left-wing activist groups are considered illegitimate actors within this framework – the parties at the center are seen as acting against the interests of the people, while political groups that express such conflicts are seen as sowing division and being driven by media manipulation. In this view, democracy should be unified and present a conflict-free interest of the people, while the role of conflicts of interests in forming social divisions is ignored. This leads to a vision of politics that aims to unite the people outside of traditional divisions but lacks the ability to form alliances with any existing political movements. Only actors of the Left party that agree with the groups’ assessment are considered legitimate. At the same time, the far-right AfD party is also legitimized, as their negative portrayal within mainstream media gains the sympathy of the page. The resulting perspective is one in which the majority of political parties and their voters are not considered legitimate opponents, and space for disagreement is sparse.

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