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**POPULISM IN EUROPE. A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CULTURALISED ECONOMIC
CONFLICT LINES IN CONTEMPORARY POPULISMS***

Abstract: This paper examines how economic factors influence populist rhetoric based on the Political Economy Theory of Populism (Manow 2019), which states that the rise of left and right populism can be determined economically. The qualitative discourse analysis explores whether populist party programmes reflect the influence of their economic environment by examining how the narrational structure and especially a populist we is constructed (based on labour market in- or outsiders). Findings show a partial confirmation of the theory: while the expected lines of conflict are reflected in the party manifestos analysed, results concerning the support of labour market in- and outsiders are not so clear cut.

Keywords: *populism, Europe, Political Economy of Populism, welfare states, Discourse Analysis.*

**POPULISMO IN EUROPA. UNA RICOSTRUZIONE DISCORSIVA COMPARATA DELLE LINEE
DI CONFLITTO ECONOMICO CULTURALIZZATE NEI POPULISMI CONTEMPORANEI**

Abstract: Questo articolo esamina come i fattori economici influenzino la retorica populista sulla base della Teoria dell'Economia Politica del Populismo (Manow 2019), secondo la quale l'ascesa del populismo di destra e di sinistra può essere determinata dal punto di vista economico. L'analisi qualitativa del discorso esplora se i programmi dei partiti populistici riflettano l'influenza del loro ambiente economico, esaminando come viene costruita la struttura narrativa e in particolare un noi populista (basato sugli *insider* o sugli *outsider* del mercato del lavoro). I risultati mostrano una parziale conferma della teoria: mentre le linee di conflitto attese si riflettono nei manifesti dei partiti analizzati, i risultati relativi al sostegno degli *in-* e degli *outsider* del mercato del lavoro non sono così netti.

Parole chiave: *populismo, Europa, Economia Politica del Populismo, stati sociali, analisi del discorso.*

Right radical populist party AfD in Germany recently polarised by calling for an «ordered dissolution of the EU» (AfD 2023: 7). And even though the polemic stance got watered down in the following national public discussions, the demand stands in line with what scholars call the «populist backlash» to European integration.

This work follows the theory of Rodrik (2018) and Manow (2019) on *how* populism forms. While Dani Rodrik set up the economic argument of why in certain regions specific societal

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cleavages emerge and produce populist protest either left- or right- winged, Philip Manow with reference to the European region states that its occurrence is the articulated scepticism to European integration (Manow 2019: 131f.) in the context of political economy processes. Other scholars have discussed economic determinants for populism within the framework of hegemonical discourse analysis (Tunderman 2022) or the discourse-power approach (Maesse 2020). Applying the sociological approach to discourse (SKAD) will provide qualitative insights into whether Manow's Political Economy of Populism applies to the discourse rhetoric of three distinct neo-nationalist populist parties: UKIP, AfD, and Podemos.

Populism, Nativism and domestic disintegration

A minimal definition and universal feature of populism is seen in the Manichean discourse construction of a «we, the people» against «the elite» (Mudde 2004: 543; Kaltwasser *et al.* 2017: 344; Rodrik 2018: 12; Bergmann 2020: 37) where the *we* claims to represent the *will of the people* (Mudde 2004: 543). Populist mobilisation often correlates with the presence of crises or transition (Bergmann 2020: 18f.) that populists can profit from by instrumentalizing them performatively (de La Torre 2013: 5; Hartleb 2004: 51; Mouffe 2018: 21).

The merging of nativism and populism created what scholars call «neo-nationalism» (Bergmann 2020). This «populist and nativist kind of contemporary nationalism» promotes conservative values and a *heartland*, a glorified past uncoupled from real history on the base of an *it used to be better in the past* approach to emotions. Neo-nationalist strategies make use of new communication tools, do not hesitate to incorporate post-truth into their strategy and generally call for a national restauration (Bergmann 2020: 38f.).

Left-political populist forces tend to argue in a social-inclusive line of arguments (Mudde - Rovira Kaltwasser 2013: 167; Mouffe: 34), progressively promoting universality and enhancement of welfare for socially underprivileged groups (Bergmann 2020: 15). Leftist rhetoric emphasizing the distinction of nations is therefore uncommon (Duyvendak *et al.* 2022: 124). Instead, left nativism appears more subtle as a «nativism without natives» (*ibid.*: 141). In the contemporary radical right political spectrum nativism in the form of biological racism, now transformed into cultural racism, often finds its way into nativist-populist rhetoric (Bergmann 2020: 48). Combined with social benefit claims and the self-attribution of defending the welfare state against migration, chauvinist attitudes get present in contemporary right-nativist populist politics and rhetoric (Bergmann 2020: 24).

As nation states continue to integrate into the world economy, they face multiple liberations that, in some cases, provide the ground for populism to flourish. «The Globalisation Paradox» (Rodrik 2011) describes challenges to national states as a consequence of «hyperglobalisation». Following the trilemma one cannot have it all: hyperglobalization,

national state and democratic politics (*ibid.*: 200). From a trade economics theory point of view it is not surprising that domestic disintegration resulting from further globalization has «deepen[ed] the divide between the winners and losers of exposure to global competition» (Rodrik 2021: 134) which is where the «populist backlash» again comes into play.

Following Rodrik, the emergence of «left-» and «right-winged populism» is characterised along the exploitation of this conflict line. Leftist populism appears dualist (socially inclusive) and right-wing populism triadic (socially exclusive) (Rodrik 2018: 24), a finding that is shared widely (Hartleb 2004: 142; Arato 2017: 286; DeHanas - Shterin 2018: 179). Populists emphasising the income divide and target the wealthy and large corporations generate left-wing populism. Populists emphasising the identity divide and target foreigners and minorities generate right-wing populism (Rodrik 2018: 24).

While Rodrik and Manow agree that economic problems first need to be «culturalized» before they can be used for political mobilization (Rodrik 2018: 24; Manow 2019: 16), Manow (2019) excludes cultural factors to explain the development of populist currents in Europe. He argues that «different manifestations of populist protest [...] can be traced back to different political economies of Europe» (*ibid.*: 15). Assuming an underlying conflict of distribution he reasons that populist protest varies depending on which of the globalisation processes, international trade or migration, is perceived as a problem. In case of migration, the form of protest also depends on if a major part of migration is made up of labour or refugee migration (*ibid.*: 62 f.). Assuming that the economic conflict line runs through the labour market Manow divides the supporters of the populist protest into labour-market insiders and outsiders (*ibid.*: 63). Labour market insiders are defined as employees «who declare to work a) on the basis of a permanent contract b) more than 30 hours per week» and outsiders as «all those who either want to work but are unemployed, or work less than 15 hours per week on the basis of fixed-term contracts or even work without any contract at all» (*ibid.*: 115).

		Migration problematic	
		yes	no
Foreign/global trade problematic	yes	c) Southern Europe: Insider and Outsider protest; left-wing	
	no		
		Labour migration	Refugee migration

Table 1. Explanatory scheme for varieties in populism in North-, South-, West- and East-Europe (Manow 2019: 68)

In welfare states which are less generous or little accessible, the argument continues, migration is less of a distribution struggle. For marginal labour-groups or unemployed however, labour

migrants become competitors on the flexibilised labour markets. In case of unemployment workers have little security network due to a lack of social security (Manow 2019: 62). In southern Europe where the labour markets are usually not fully liberalised political protest opposes against the liberalisation regime of the EU which combines free trade and austerity policies – creating a pressure to adapt liberalised labour market policies (*ibid.*: 63). The very flexible Southern European informal labour markets, for labour migrants easily accessible and free from social benefits, stand in great contrast to their formal sectors. The dualist labour market becomes the conflict line on which populist protest unfolds. Populism here emerges to protect the formal sector from the informal sector, defending the privileges of labour market insiders (*ibidem*). The dualist labour market instead of the welfare state then is stylised as the centre of populist protest. Interpreting migration as a means to stabilise the dualism (by providing the informal sector with sufficient work force), «here, nativist¹ populist attitudes refer to the (formal) labour market, not to the welfare state, and therefore articulate left- and not right-wing populism» (*ibid.*: 63f.).

In Nordic and continental European countries high productivity, high competitiveness, and export-orientation correlate (Soskice - Hall 2002: 8 ff.). Generally high wages and a high domestic price-level result in relatively expensive low-productive services. A high level of refugee migration pressures the conflict line which then gets instrumentalized by populist protest (Manow 2019: 64). Other research confirms: disapproval of migration is higher, the better accessible and more generous the welfare state is (Rapp 2017). Referring to Esping-Andersen's well-known *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990), Germany is defined as a conservative welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990: 49). Even though the UK features a liberal, market leaning state organisation, it does not classify as ideal type or «'pure' case [...] of liberal hegemony» (*ibid.*: 88) it is referred to as a liberal political economy in the European context (cf. Manow 2019: 105). Southern European welfare states for most parts were excluded from Esping-Andersen's typology. However, features of southern European welfare systems have been identified that characterise the «southern welfare syndrome» which can be translated as clientelism (Ferrera 2000: 167). Spain is categorized as a Southern European welfare type (Rhodes 1996: 1; Ferrera 2000: 166) where the division of «insiders» and «outsiders» in the welfare sector is also found in the separation of the formal and informal labour market (Manow 2019: 63f.).

Hall and Soskice describe how the impact of globalization on labour markets led «away from labor's traditional national distributional agendas toward employers' firm-level concerns with productivity and efficiency» (Hall - Soskice 2001: 71) and deepened domestic disintegration through liberalisation measures. Considering the marginalised position that especially short-term workers occupy in the highly flexible British labour markets, it becomes

¹ Nativism should be replaced by neo-nationalism, referring to the merge of nativism with populism as brought forward by Bergmann (2020).

more understandable why labour migration could be a line of conflict in this environment. In Germany long-term contracting in conjunction with relying on a social safety net for the unemployed (Hall - Soskice 2001: 25) hints on welfare chauvinist attitudes in times of refugee migration. In Spain «Mediterranean Capitalism» with a sharp line of welfare insiders and outsiders linked to a mirroring separation on the liberalized labour markets foreshadows conflict lines concerning not the welfare state but the labour market. The distinction of «Coordinated Market Economies» (CME) and «Liberal Market Economies» (LME)² (Hall - Soskice 2001) relates to the labour market dimension of the analysis. Hall and Soskice typologize the UK as a Liberal and Germany as a Coordinated Market Economy (Hall - Soskice 2001: 19; Manow 2019: 104). Spains economy is typologised as a «more ambiguous» (Hall - Soskice 2001: 21), «Mediterranean» type of capitalism³.

Manows sees populist protest as a counter-reaction to (further) European integration (Manow 2019: 138). Recalling Rodrik (2018) one could see in the forms of protest the manifested opposition to liberalisation policies and domestic disintegration on the one hand and the demand for globalised democracy on the other. The three political parties to be analysed rhetorically are the British UKIP, the German AfD and the Spanish Podemos. The parties were chosen as they each come from different national welfare and market economy contexts. They each represent a case in line with Manows differentiation of populisms in Europe (Table 1).

Methodological background

The combination of the theoretical background with Reiner Kellers *Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse* (SKAD) is expected to give insights on how economic structures influence populist rhetoric. Based in grounded theory SKADs inductive qualitative research approach allows for analysing the complexity of discourses by examining the analysis of materialities and the analysis of meaning/knowledge dimension (Keller 2005: 12). The «material dimension» is concerned e.g., with key actors and their positioning and performance in discourse, their relations and their practices and strategies of discourse production and reproduction (Keller 2005: 12). The analysis of the meaning/knowledge dimension focusses on the symbolic order,

² LMEs are usually accompanied by liberal welfare states, which emphasize low-levels of benefits and means testing and thereby strengthen the fluid labour markets that companies use to manage their relationships with workers (Esping-Andersen 1990; Hall - Soskice 2001: 51f.). Companies in CMEs on the other hand are more dependent on nonmarket relationships to coordinate their efforts and develop their core competencies. Contracting is more relational and incomplete, a lot of information is passed on via networks (Hall - Soskice 2001: 8).

³ This type is made up by « a large agrarian sector and recent histories of extensive state intervention that have left them with specific kinds of capacities for non-market coordination in the sphere of corporate finance but more liberal arrangements in the sphere of labour relations » (Hall - Soskice 2001: 21).

achieved by materialities of discourse. As indicated the populist currents were selected based on Manow's theory of underlying economic structures, which provides three classifications:

- a) Right-wing channelled outsider protest
- b) Right-wing channelled insider protest
- c) Left-wing channelled insider- and outsider protest (Manow 2018: 68).

Recalling the theoretical background regarding capitalisms (Soskice - Hall 2001) and types of welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990), the selected parties are a) UKIP, b) AfD and c) Podemos. Applying Manow's (2019) work to discourse theory one must assume that every discourse led by a populist party circles around the cleavages explained in Table 1, and in relation to the labour markets. It is assumed that the classification «self-positioning» is essential for analysing differences in populist discourses and for exploring the assumption that the rhetorical strategies correspond to the (welfare) economic environment.

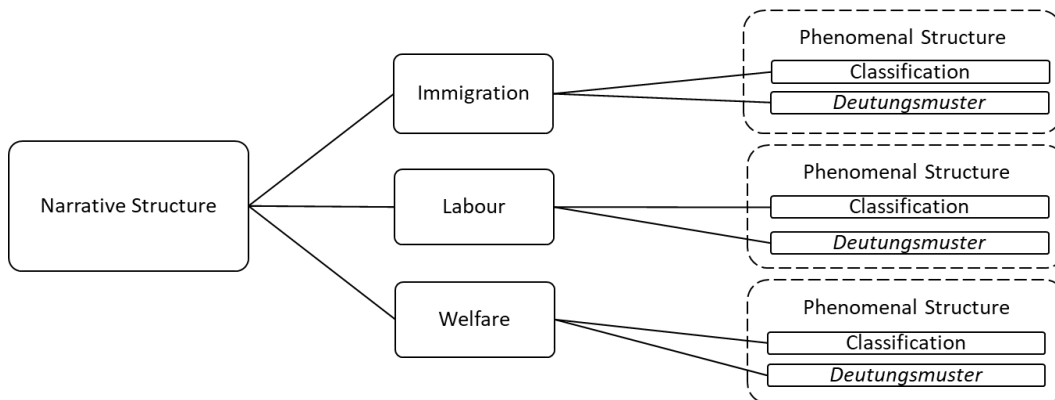


Figure 1. *Method-Design*

The method design as shown in Figure 1 will be applied to each party and its analysis corpus. The analysis material is composed of the three most current party manifestos published by UKIP (2015, 2017, 2022), AfD (2016, 2021, 2023) and Podemos (2019, 2019, 2021). UKIP manifestos cover the 2015 and 2017 UK general election manifestos as well as the general policy programme. AfD's programme selection contains the 2016 general policy programme, the most current national election programme as well as the manifesto for the 2024 European Parliament election. The variety of programmes allows for identifying the core policy demands. As for Podemos, the selection includes the 2019 European Parliament election manifesto, as well as the manifesto for the 2019 Spanish national elections. For the 2023 national election Podemos joined the party alliance Sumar, disqualifying the 2023 manifesto for analysis. At the time of analysis, the 2021 general programme *Documento Politico* was the most current national programme and included in the analysis.

The rough corpus of the analysis is made of the chapters corresponding the political spheres chosen (immigration, labour policies, welfare). This includes obvious content overlaps such as *Arbeits- und Sozialpolitik* (labour and social policy) (AfD 2021: 118) or *Immigration* (UKIP 2015: 10) as well as less obviously relevant chapters, such as those on family policy, where notions of the welfare state are often linked to self-positioning. During the reading of the chapters, the codebook was gradually formed and adapted with the qualitative analysis software NVivo. Beforehand the phenomenal structure was set out as a table, including different *Dimensions* and *Contents* inspired by Keller (1998: 232). The fine analysis included revisiting the coded sequences and filling the table as well as summarizing and adapting the *Deutungsmuster* (interpretative schemes) until the most powerful ones were identified.

The final step of the analysis was the deconstruction of the narrative structure based on the phenomenal structure.

Analysis

The respective economic, cultural, and social environment of the parties chosen for analysis varies massively. Each party history of origins (and success) is unique and fits the corresponding national context. However, the historical party backgrounds are only briefly mentioned, as the focus of the analysis lays on the deconstruction of culturalised economic lines of conflict.

United Kingdom (UKIP)

While in the 70s the UK was considered to have a relatively generous welfare state, flanked by «a favourable economic climate, with near-full employment, [that] ensured that benefit dependency was low» (O'Grady 2022: 28), welfare attitudes⁴ in the British public shifted from the 1980s onwards to a negative stance. Assumptions like «benefits make people lazy» and the decline of support for redistribution of wealth increased (*ibid.*: 29). Policy reforms like the welfare-to-work agenda accompanied those shifts. Those policy changes adjusted «Welfare systems that were designed for an earlier era of near-full employment [...] to deal with the challenges of contemporary labour markets. This has included activation, reduced generosity, conditionality, sanctioning, and means testing» (*ibid.*: 37), pushing UK into the direction of an LME accompanied by a liberal welfare state.

In this welfare and economic environment, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) was chosen as the corresponding (right-national) populist party, testing the political economy of populism

⁴ Welfare attitudes are individual opinions on the welfare state and examined by polls. Question or statements may be “should spending be increased?” or “people who claim welfare benefits are lazy”.

theory. UKIP is described by scholars as a traditional right-wing conservative party synthesising «the Eurosceptic and the conservative traditions into a distinctive populist narrative» (Tournier-Sol 2015: 154).

Examining the electoral perspective, some emphasize the «left behind» theory in which losers of globalisation form protest to backlash international integration, making it a «working class phenomenon» (Ford - Goodwin 2014: 270; Rodrik 2021: 134). But also self-employed, positioned right-wing of the social classes, have been found to be pro UKIP, backed up by support from the «professional and managerial middle classes» (Evans - Mellon 2019: 77). The 2004 decision on open immigration from EU Accession is expected to have had a massive influence on the rise of UKIP by opening a new political dimension. The subsequent increase in EU accession migration and the growing popular concern was not met by the governments – providing the opportunity for populist UKIP to channel the concerns (Evans - Mellon 2019: 83f.).

Dimension	Immigration	Labour/Economy	Welfare State
Problem definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncontrolled mass migration • Population growth • Loss of border-control (sovereignty) • Conservative party has weakened borders and immigration law • Political establishment ignores the people 	European labour and immigration have driven down wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public finances are a mess • Welfare tourism • Housing and medical welfare problem
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political establishment has failed • International instruments (EU, UN) undermine sovereignty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU work policies • Taxes • Globalisation 	Mismanagement of finances by labour and conservatives
Call to action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stopping uncontrolled mass migration/control immigration • Regaining sovereignty over borders • Regulate population growth (immigration/migration calculations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave EU to restore British tax and labour market sovereignty (2015) • Restrict (labour) immigration, support small businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound financial management • Strict restriction to welfare benefits for immigrants

<p>Self-positioning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing up against the failure of the political establishment • Making sense to immigration politics • Solving the problem(s) during crisis • Voice of the voiceless • Distinguishing from conservatives • Close to public, «footsoldiers» 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • «British workers, we will stand up for you and fight your corner» • UKIP is only party to back British Businesses and workers • Stand up for self-employed people 	<p>Protecting the British welfare from foreigners</p>
<p>Other-positioning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • «Migrant industry» • «Lying establishment elite in politics, Big Business, the media, the quangocracy and globalists world-wide» • Political establishment • Degrading of immigrants («Clash of cultures») • International treaties and bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unscrupulous politicians • Pro EU lobby • Government just wants to boost big economies and neglects British workers 	<p>«Migrant industry» supporting the influx of foreigners</p>
<p>Wealth-model/welfare-type</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK economy doesn't owe non-contributors nothing • UK first (neo-nationalist) • Labour market secured against labour migration • «Free speech, democracy, independence, patriotism, equality» (UKIP, 2027, 35f.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal spending model • Non-contributors don't deserve being in UK • Diminish role of the state, free markets, private enterprises • Protectionism, nationalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal welfare model • Small businesses are backbone of economy • Pro-business mindset (private sector)
<p>Values</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserving the nation • The need to (economically) contribute to be deserving • Downgrading of «illegals» • Nativism, neo-nationalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British work ethos restricted by EU (2015) • Protecting workers rights • UK economy is independent from EU • Anti-globalisation of labour market and industries • Liberalism • «Worth through work» 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationals first • Only contributors to the economy are deserving of benefits

Table 2. *Phenomenal structure UKIP*

The Phenomenal Structure of the populist discourse UKIP articulates is shown in Table 3. A change in discourse over the years occurred when Brexit was carried out and with it UKIPs main claim got fulfilled. Since then, less EU-skepticism found its way into the manifestos. As for the immigration complex, UKIP stems its line of argument on transforming immigrants

into numbers and problematizing the so called «mass migration» and «unstoppable population growth» (UKIP 2022: 11). The stylization of demographic change as a core problem extends to different topics such as housing⁵, women's policies⁶ and medical welfare⁷, always under the premise «British citizens first» which also shows in the thematic interface between immigration and labour. In this nexus, the wealth and welfare model of the UK get reflected as well as UKIP's right radical neo-nationalist stance based in neo-liberalist nativism. It was mentioned repeatedly that immigration would drive down wages and leads to job loss of British workers (e.g., UKIP 2015: 12, 40, 41). The sentence «The Trade deals must be about trade not backdoor immigration» (UKIP 2022: 54) reveals the fear of internationalized labour markets impacting the British workforce negatively. This fear is also expressed in the request to «allow employers to prioritise British citizens for jobs» (UKIP 2015: 45). The strongest reference to keeping the informal sector closed to immigration is made by the statement that «The Party opposes importing cheap foreign workers (legal or illegal) to do menial jobs in the 'black economy' because that is detrimental to the UK. These people undercut and take work from UK citizens, and they do not contribute to the government revenue» (UKIP 2022: 55).

Simultaneously UKIP strongly opposes global-player companies, stylises them as «Predators» who «take control» and «often abandon the UK workforce and national interests» (UKIP, 2022: 55). The classification is made complete when this enemy image gets contrasted with the local, British small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (UKIP, 2015: 43) that are the «lifeblood of our economy» (UKIP 2017: 13). UKIP openly displays this clientelism stating that «The UK Independence Party is the party of small and medium sized businesses» (UKIP 2022: 53), positioning themselves on the side of the «regular workers», the «normal people». The wealth-model UKIP expresses is based in neo-liberalism and the principle of deservingness. UKIP wants to strictly contain immigration «while still allowing the brightest and the best from around the world to make their home in Britain and contribute to our society and our economy» (UKIP 2017: 32). The assumption that only the ones who can contribute to the British economy and generate economic welfare reflects a «worth through work» ethos. In contrast, UKIP states «illegal immigrants will never have contributed to the UK economy, and we owe these individuals nothing» (UKIP 2022: 14). This expression can be considered as a right-radicalized form of what Esping-Andersen typologised the «traditional, liberal work-ethic norms» (Esping-Andersen 1990: 48). Advocating against international labour markets combined with the anti-global-players attitude reflects societal conflict along the globalisation cleavage of labour migration condensed in populist protest.

⁵ «Controlling the numbers of new migrants coming to Britain is one important part of the housing jigsaw» (UKIP 2015: 35).

⁶ «Mass uncontrolled immigration has opened the door to a host of people from cultures with little or no respect for women» (UKIP 2017: 36).

⁷ «The NHS is a national health service not an international health service. It is open to widespread abuse by non-UK citizens. Open borders have had a major impact on existing NHS resources» (UKIP 2022: 28).

UKIP addresses both labour market insiders and outsiders by emphasizing support for the (higher) middle class and self-employed, propagating with slogans like «British workers first!» (UKIP 2022: 55) and «British workers, our promise to you: we will stand up for you and fight your corner» (UKIP 2015: 40). UKIP's neo-nationalist stance gets evident by emphasizing the goal that unemployed British workers will be favoured in the allocation of jobs.

Germany (AfD)

Introducing the term of the «new welfare state» as adaption to globalisation is essential to understanding the success of AfD in Germany. The term describes welfare reforms that respond to (through liberalisation and globalisation processes) structurally less secure living conditions «with less protection as well as with regulations that change the practice of its institutions in such a way that new kinds of uncertainties also arise from them» (Betzelt - Bode, 2018, p. 10). Those shifts in the labour markets, impacted by globalisation (Hall - Soskice 2001: 71), enforced adaption pressure especially on conservative welfare states.

In «new welfare states» institutionalised welfare-insecurity (dismantling social benefits) contributes to the insecurity of the population and independent of objective affluence factors causes a subject *feeling* of deprivation (Betzelt - Bode 2018: 10f.; Bergmann 2020: 23). In Germany those developments were caused by the rise of financial market capitalism (Betzelt - Bode 2018: 11). It destabilised the employment systems with its «volatility and inherent logic» by changing basic transactions in economy logic. Governmental deregulation policies supported those developments» (Betzelt - Bode 2018: 10). The hegemony of market competition and efficiency logic further changed the role of the welfare state and even though social expenditures in most cases did not get reduced, the state adapted an «activating» instead of a «caring» role (*ibid.*: 14), restricting access to social benefits or linking it to performance.

Scholars theorised that the success of AfD also stems from reinforcing and exploiting that fear. AfD was founded in 2013 «by heterogenous actors that fundamentally contested established policies» (Pytlas - Biehler 2023: 327) as an EU-sceptical party with a right-liberal core. Some judge AfD's early years similar to populist movement parties like the left populist Italian Movimento Cinque Stelle, due to AfD's ties to the right extremist movement PEGIDA as well as the adaption of social movement practices, providing a «partisan political anchor for nationalist and right-wing protests» (Schwörer 2019: 42; see also Häusler 2016: 242). Since its foundation, intra-party struggles have shaped the orientation of AfD massively, radicalising towards the far-right. The nationalist right radical wing *Der Flügel*, organised around right-extremist Björn Höcke, received growing support within the party, power-challenging the more conservative liberal forces around co-founder Bernd Lucke. After losing the party leadership election to the right radical wing in 2015, Lucke left the party and with him a large share of his supporters, marking «the last step step in the AfD's shift towards core right radical ideology»

(Pytlas - Biehler 2023: 331). Since March 2022 AfD is officially classified as a right extremist suspect case by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bpb 2022).

Paradoxically, AfD tends to oppose the international finance regime while many of their economic ideas are rooted in neoliberalism, upholding market forces, privatisation, and performance capacity (Schmidt 2018: 49). This finding is in line with the assumption of radical right parties deliberately downplaying economic issues to avoid «antagonis[ing] one part or another of their electorate» (Enggist - Pinggera 2022: 102f.). Their electorate correspondingly is based on «the self-employed and (mostly middle-class) entrepreneurs – and by no means only on the ‘disconnected’ sections of the proletariat» (Schmidt 2018: 49). As found by Enggist and Pinggera (2022) in a quantitative manifesto comparison, the AfD manifesto together with other right radical manifestos devoted by far the lowest share to social policies (*ibid.*: 115).

Dimension	Immigration	Labour/Economy	Welfare
Problem definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No free speech about immigration policies Failed migration policies attracting more migrants, causing people drowning on seas Run on and exploitation of the welfare system Overcrowded housing market Increase of criminality in Germany 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU Freedom of movement (of workforce) Decrease in national birthing rates causes shortage of skilled workers Pressure on national labour markets through labour migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overly stressed welfare system (by migrants) Abused welfare system (by migrants)
Call to action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stricter anti-migration law Complete shut-down of outer EU borders Stop family reunification (to protect welfare state) Restrict welfare benefits (to tangible goods) and link them to e.g. language skills Closing German border within Schengen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abolish tax burdens for families Promote many-children families (link to bio-racism) Rely on technical development Qualification of nationals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforce strict migration policies to prevent abuse of the welfare system Implement sustainable, reliable social benefits for (native) socio-economically worse off groups

Self-positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposing the “nonsense migration policies” with strict anti-migration demands • «The People» as sovereign to solve crises that government failed to solve (and created) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocating for the unemployed • Demanding policy changes benefitting workers in the lower income segments • Supporting the middle class • Supporting SMEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting many-children-families • Fighting for socio-economically worse off groups
Other-positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes parties want to distract from the discourse • «Immigration Lobby» and media • «Cartel like migration industry» • EU legislations restrict national authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned economy • EU Austerity • Governmental market intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migrant industry supporting immigration in social system • EU asylum policies
Wealth-model/welfare-type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generous welfare state • Chauvinist (welfare benefits only for nationals) • «Deservingness» model: only migrants «genuinely» in need deserve German welfare benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family as nucleus (deserving special treatment by the state) • Liberalism • International trade as «basis of our welfare» 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative welfare model • Generous welfare state • Performance-linked • Welfare system closely related to families (e.g., proposing a retirement system depending on how many children one took care of)
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genuine vs. not real refugees • More successful if emigration causes get treated in countries of origin • Germans 1st (Labour) • Assimilation as goal • Immigrants have the obligation to integrate (or assimilate) • Loss of meaning of German nationality • Incompatibility of cultures • European cultural area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work ethos: Reforming the benefits for jobless to create an incentive for work • Promote many-children families (to prevent shortage of skilled workers) • Using national potential of workforces first • Linking immigration linearly to the needs of the labour market • Germany as one of the leading industrial nations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exaggerated position of the family as «nucleus of society» • «Natives first» • Securing welfare system against migrants

Table 3. Phenomenal structure AfD

AfD embeds its communication on immigration into a framework of allegedly oppressed free speech. Arguing on the ground that «this kind of handling of non-conformist opinions has been a feature of totalitarian states in the past, but not of free democracies» (AfD 2016: 58), AfD self-positions on one hand as the underdog fighting against an ideologically totalitarian regime. On the other hand, AfD allows itself everything under the guise of free speech, from xenophobic to right-wing extremist to culturally and biologically racist slogans.

Problematising the demographic change AfD reveals its biological racism by stating that national birth rates must get higher in the eye of a conflicting so-called mass migration (AfD 2016: 41). Elsewhere it is said that «the enormous population growth on the African continent in particular plays an overriding role» in the causes of migration movements (AfD 2021: 90). Both show the neo-nationalist right radical core at the centre of AfD ideology. AfDs concern of «immigration into the German social systems» is the strongest *Deutungsmuster* identified. It gets repeated multiple times (e.g., 2016: 58, 62, 63, 2021: 96) and extends to a wider EU criticism: The asserted loss of sovereignty over national borders combined with the problematisation of intra-EU-migration. AfD even dedicated a whole chapter to this narrative: «Limit immigration of EU-foreigners into our social systems» (AfD 2021: 118). Connected to this is the concern of «[m]ass migration creat[ing] wage pressure up into the middle class and lead[ing] to competition for social benefits» (*ibid.*: 99). The connection between migration, labour and social welfare becomes evident in this statement and reveals the welfare-model which is assumed by AfD: A limited resource that needs to be defended against foreigners.

Another *Deutungsmuster* standing out is the differentiation of migrant groups into «genuine refugees», who get persecuted in their country of origin, and «irregular migrants», who in the eyes of AfD «cannot claim refugee protection» (AfD 2016: 19). At the same time «Immigrants qualified for the labour market with a high willingness to integrate are welcome to us» (*ibid.*: 62). This *Deutungsmuster* is similar to the one identified in UKIPs rhetoric. It reveals the neoliberal stance of AfD and the inherent value of «worth-through-work». It declassifies immigrants as unworthy and unwelcome if they do not bring «valuable skills» that benefit the nation. Like UKIPs argumentation along the workers force AfD foreshadows wage dumping due to migration pressuring German labour markets (*ibid.*: 36, 2023: 33). AfDs goal is to prevent labour migration that could be covered by nationals and only allow «truly qualified migrants» to migrate (AfD 2016: 62). But while UKIP is building the argument more on economic reasons, AfD argues alongside the «cultural hazard» as well as an overly stressed social system labour migration allegedly brings (AfD 2016: 42, 63). In this context AfD advocates for preferring AI, robotics- or digitalisation-based processes that can replace workforce over immigration (AfD 2023: 27) which again shows how AfD declassifies immigrants, trying to prevent migration by all means.

AfD positions itself on the side of socio-economically worse off groups and demands «reliable social security for pensioners, the unemployed and workers in the lower wage or

salary segment» (AfD 2023: 33), hence articulating outsider-protest. Simultaneously, advocating concern for «wage pressure up into the middle class» (AfD 2021: 99) matches the articulation of labour-market insiders interests. The concern of «competition for social benefits» brings both together, the socially secured insiders who support the welfare system by paying taxes to profit from it and would have to fear the exploitation of «their» welfare system, as well as the outsiders who rely on the system and have to fear to walk away empty-handed.

Spain (Podemos)

In the Spanish case, the emergence of an «underdeveloped» Southern European welfare type (Rhodes 1996: 1; Ferrera 2000: 166) leads back to the fascist Franco dictatorship. Francoism is described as «class dictatorship against the working population» being «responsible for the enormous economic and cultural underdevelopment in Spain» (Navarro 2015: 406). Clientelism favoured the oligarchy «that is, the agricultural, financial, and (in the case of Catalonia and Basque Country in Spain) industrial bourgeoisie», that was still influencing Spanish economy after the death of Franco and the transition into a democracy 1978.

Joining the EU in 1986, Spanish economy was negatively affected by the introduction of the Euro during the turn of the millennium, causing an increase in public debts. The scope of the public deficit increased to 6% of Spanish gross national product making it incompatible with the Maastricht Criteria⁸ (*ibid.*: 409). To reduce the debt, public spending was cut down, affecting salaries and social benefits (*ibid.*: 409, 420). Tax cut reforms introduced by governing socialist leader José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero from Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) caused a lack in states budget when the international financial crisis hit in 2007. Again, the answer was austerity policies, promoted by EU institutions (European Council, European Commission, ECB) and the International Monetary Fund. The conservative Popular Party (PP), in force at that time and led by Mariano Rajoy, promoted those policies. During 2012 and 2013 the reforms caused large cuts in public social spending and worsened labour market conditions. Temporary and precarious working contracts became the majority of new contracts. High unemployment numbers remained and about two thirds of the unemployed did not have unemployment insurance (*ibid.*: 405). The Spanish labour market and welfare system is sharply divided into in- an outsider, where outsider represent a precarious and marginalised group, excluded from welfare transfers and the more secure formal labour market.

Before this background, Podemos was founded in 2014 as part of the anti-austerity movement in Spain. Already in the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections, Podemos gained 8% of the vote-share, corresponding to five seats in the EP. Spanish national elections 2015 were a success as well. Podemos, here with 69 seats, advanced to the third largest political

⁸ Maastricht Criteria allow for max. 3% of public deficit in comparison to the gross national product.

force in Spain. Failed government negotiations after national elections in April 2019 led to the election in November, where Podemos and its political allies (forming Unidos Podemos) gained 35 seats in the Congress of Deputies. The following coalition government formed by PSOE and Podemos became the first multi-party cabinet in Spain (Rama *et al.* 2021).

Dimension	Immigration	Labour/Economy	Welfare
Problem definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geopolitical and economic conflicts inherent in neoliberal model causes forced migration • Crisis of multilateralism • Mediterranean region especially affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare reform took away workers rights • EU austerity and neoliberal crisis • Policies of fiscal austerity and wage devaluation • «Decada Perdida» (lost decade) due to austerity policies cutting back welfare spending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neoliberal offensive • Spain is socially underdeveloped • Inequality is governmental made • Dismantling of the public sector • «Lost decade» of welfare policies
Call to action	Human rights centred approach to asylum and migration policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End short term contracting • Protect workers rights • Against EU austerity policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen unemployment policies (esp. for youth) • Shift welfare services/benefits to public institutions • Universalize • Supporting role of the state
Self-positioning	Advocating for human rights and secure migration routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support workers in precarious situations • Support public sector • As governmental party pushing leftist policies (expansionary policies after pandemic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feminist • Stands up for those left behind (low-wage sector workers, workers, socio-economically marginalised groups) • Fights for the victims of austerity
Other-positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), PP (Popular Party) • Zapatero and Rajoy's welfare system reforms (former cabinets) • European elite imposing austerity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), PP (Popular Party) • Zapatero and Rajoy's welfare system reform • European elite imposing austerity • Spanish elites cooperating • Oligopolies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brussels dictating economic impositions • Bipartisan government • Right-wingers that see inequality as the engine of economic processes

Wealth-model/welfare-type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal welfare benefits • Securing migration routes • Making a decent life possible for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible labour market • Dualist labour market (formal/informal sector) • Lean welfare state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediterranean welfare model • «Underdeveloped» and lean welfare state • Dualist
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanism • Democracy • Universality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good life through work needs to be possible • Strong unions • Social-inclusionary • Feminist policy making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High wages need to pay more taxes • Redistribution of wealth • Universal • Social inclusion

Table 4. *Phenomenal structure Podemos*

Migration is not too big of a topic in Podemos party manifestos. The axis of problematisation rather focuses on international trade/global market and concentrates on the dualist labour market.

Podemos’ narrative structure evolves around problematizing the neoliberal model and austerity policies. The «neoliberal crisis» is reflected in inhumane migration policies (Podemos 2019b: 40). The migration policy proposed by Podemos focuses not only on humanism but also on the admission of people who «left various European Union states because of austerity policies and cutbacks and who are now seeking to return to their countries of origin» (*ibid.*: 40). Austerity and its consequences get linked to different facets of migration. Analysing the labour/economy and welfare sphere their linkage to the anti-austerity/anti-neoliberalism narrational structure becomes evident. Brussels is stylised as proxy to the EU policies and repeatedly blamed for imposing neoliberal policy practises that resulted into a «lost decade» of social policies in Spain (Podemos 2019b: 28; 2021: 24f.). Podemos opposes the dismantling of public policies and of the welfare state as well as the cutback of social benefits, representing the interests of the workers and also including feminist perspectives (Podemos 2019a: 74f.).

Podemos emphasizes its anti-capital-finance-elite stance by othering the political establishment as the «Business circle» that approved of the «dictate of the Troika»⁹. Said dictate, following Podemos, put into place «labour reforms that have prevented people from recovering pre-crisis welfare levels» (*ibid.*: 74) and thereby strengthened «local elites» while the «middle and working classes have paid for the adjustment» (*ibid.*: 13). Podemos repeatedly calls for «Eliminat[ing] the so-called ‘flexibilisation’ introduced by the PSOE and PP labour reforms, which introduces a high degree of precariousness through massive temporary contracts» (*ibid.*: 74). Podemos also advocates for the public sector by demanding pay equalisation and enhancement of labour policies for the police and the civil guard, the military, prison officers,

⁹ The Troika is the group of the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund, authorised to manage the aftermath of the Financial Crisis 2007-2008.

firefighting and rescue services sector and forest firefighters (Podemos 2019a: 80ff). Protecting the flexible Spanish labour market from further liberalisation policies while advocating for a stronger formal public sector shows the dualist stance of the Spanish labour market. Also, Podemos wants to increase the role of the state and welfare spending (Podemos 2019a: 84; 2019b: 28; 2021: 27).

Especially interesting for the context of this work is the proposal of «A European Employment Statute». Podemos argues that «With this new common regulatory framework, a ‘floor of rights’ will be established which will make it possible to equalise - in terms of labour rights - the situation of workers in the different States in order to avoid competition and the harm that this causes to all workers» (Podemos 2019b: 19). On one hand international European labour standards would improve workers’ employment situations. Yet the nation states’ labour markets would get more permeable for work migration, undermining the informal sector and weakening the dualism between the formal and informal labour market. Here interests of labour market outsiders are represented but only in parts the interests of (formal) labour market insiders, who would have to share their privileged position and resources with the former outsiders.

Discussion

The analysis showed expression of the expected lines of conflict, with a focus on labour market migration in UKIPs manifestos and an emphasis of alleged migration into the social system in AfD’s communication. In the Spanish case, opposition against the «neoliberal hegemony» builds the core of Podemos’ narrative. Podemos constructs a socially inclusive «we» that stands against liberalisation reforms and fights for the workers’ rights. Self-positioning can be identified strongly on the loser-side of austerity policies and international finance. A strong focus lays on the condemnation of temporary and precarious contracting, representing the interests of workers in the informal sector. The formal sector is advocated for by claiming the enhancement of labour policies in the public sector.

The corresponding electorate gets addressed directly and the parties claim to be on their side, fight for them and heroically end the misery brought by the so-called establishment. However, AfD’s self-positioning along labour market outsiders opposes Manow’s theory, as in the German case insider-led protest was expected. Generally showing a strong focus on labour forces, UKIP shows its nationalist stance by demanding to prefer national workers over work migration. At the same time UKIP addresses insiders by advocating for the (upper) middle class and SMEs, mirroring a neoliberal value system of «working your way up».

AfD, next to positioning at the side of socio-economically worse off like the unemployed also repeatedly shows concern for wage pressure, allegedly caused by migration. Labour market

and welfare-insiders' interests are strongly represented by trying to «protect» the labour market as well as welfare benefits from opening up to migration, showing a chauvinist and social-exclusionist worldview.

Even though in Podemos' case advocating for both, in- and outsiders of the labour market is found, it does not stand completely in line with Manow's argument. He assumes that migration into the informal sector stabilises the dualist labour market which is why the populist protest and nativist tendencies refer to the formal labour market with the goal to protect it from the informal sector. Instead, Podemos internationally claims closer social and welfare cooperation within the EU although equalisation and enhancement of labour policies and social security in the EU would undermine the dualism of labour markets. The demand for enhancing working conditions in the informal sector stands contrary to the Political Economy Theory of Populism as the expansion of social security services in relation to the labour market undermines the privileged position of labour market insiders who would have to share welfare resources. Another noteworthy discovery during the analysis was the presence of neo-nationalist rhetoric in all programs. All parties oppose globalisation tendencies, in UKIP's case by denouncing global players, international migration treaties, and propagating the loss of sovereignty, in AfD's case by disapproving EU migration agreements and the alleged loss of national borders and in Podemos' case by opposing the so-called austerity regime of the EU. The conflict lines as predicted by Manow were presented accordingly. With their rhetoric, the parties question the «order of knowledge» (here: globalisation processes) by presenting alternative patterns of interpretation, classification schemes and seemingly coherent narratives for social processes.

Considering the *culturalization* of conflict lines especially shows importance when looking at UKIP's and AfD's right radical and racist social exclusion of foreigners as the attempt to secure social hierarchies and privileges. Those attitudes cannot merely be explained with economic factors, as they inherit an understanding of inequality of human life, favouring oneself. Explaining the emergence of populist currents with economic factors and assuming their support stems from the corresponding positioning of labour market in- and outsiders embeds the discussion about populism in a more objective framework. This analysis provided insights on how those economic factors get reflected in party communication. But even though economic factors should be consulted explaining the emergence of populisms, completely dismissing cultural influences cannot be a solution. Further research is needed to meet the demand for an explanation of the *culturalization* of conflict lines.

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